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BY ALLAN ROSS MACDOUGALL

*Isadora Duncan's Russian Days*

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*And The Greeks . . .*

*The Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay* (Editor)



# ISADORA

Revolutionary in Art and Love



*Allan Ross Macdougall*



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## *Preface*



ISADORA DUNCAN died in a bizarre accident, far from her native land, over three decades ago. An international legend during her own star-crossed lifetime, there has since grown up around her name and artistry a confused and luxuriant thicket of myths, misinformation, and complete misconception.

Many of these growths sprang up and flourished from seeds which she herself dropped, for she delighted in leading friends and inquiring reporters down the garden path with a gaily tossed-off quip or a rococo explanation of some simple fact—"Yes, this emerald brooch was given to me in India by a Maharaja." How was a reporter to know that she had never set foot in India? And in her extraordinary autobiography which she spasmodically wrote and dictated during the last years of her life—most often when far removed from documentary aid or easily consulted facts and verifiable dates—she sometimes strayed from the austere road of truth into romantic bypaths of exaggeration. Often, to please her delighted listeners—I was happy to be of that small band on many occasions in Paris and Nice—very often, she dwelt wordily, though amusingly, in a never-never land of fantasy. What Leo Stein has called "the problems of memory and its peculiar operations" seldom troubled her.

"Who was Isadora?" a young Italian journalist asked me in Bordighera a few years ago. The name had come up when I was brief-

ing him on her friend, Gordon Craig, who was then about to visit the Riviera resort after a twenty years' absence from Italy. I was only momentarily shocked, for I was quite aware that my youthful interlocutor had grown up in a war-shattered Europe, a chaotic world where events moved at a feverish pace. We both were part of a society where the names of ephemeral movie stars and puppet politicians of today—through sustained publicity in the press and on radio and TV—are naturally better known than those of the greatest stage figures or statesmen of yesterday.

Yet even I—I to whom the names of Duse, or Woodrow Wilson, or Chaliapin, or Keir Hardie mean something—can also ask rhetorically: "Who was Isadora?" I saw her plain; I travelled with her; I lived with her; I loved her as a great human being and never ceased admiring her as one of the world's great artists. As I have read through the vast amount of published material about her, however, I have been as baffled as many others who have known her only from second-hand accounts.

Who was Isadora? Was she the personality tersely summed up in a French encyclopaedia?—"DUNCAN, Isadora. (1877 [sic]-1927) born San Francisco (California) dancer whose existence was particularly tormented. She wished to renew the dance through the inspiration of antique monuments and founded schools of dancing in Europe and America." Was she the woman whose name occasionally appears in a syndicated American newspaper column: "TODAY'S FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS. MAY 27," in company with those of Arnold Bennett, Jay Gould, Julia Ward Howe, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and followed by the notation: "Isadora Duncan, 1878-1927. Unpredictable eccentric whose fame rests as much on the anecdotes told about her unusual behavior as on the memory of her great talents as a classical dancer."?

Was she the performer seen through the childishly uncomprehending eyes of the young Agnes de Mille? "A fat, cross-eyed woman in dull costumes made of material like portieres." Or that seen by the young Austrian poet, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, when she first appeared in Vienna?—"She looked like a Pan, intoxicated with youth; like a young god, melancholy and ardent with love." Was she the solo dancer whose first appearance in St. Petersburg in 1905,

according to the founder of the *Ballets Russe*, Serge Diaghilev, "gave an irreparable jolt to the classic ballet of Imperial Russia"? Or was she then, as a famous Russian ballerina later wrote, "A New England [sic] miss," who could be curtly dismissed by one of the historians of the Russian Ballet, Prince Peter Lievin, with: "It was a pity that as a dancer Duncan was a dilettante and did not possess an adequate technique"?

The Isadora Duncan described by one of her French contemporaries, Yvette Guilbert, as "The greatest American . . ." and the Isadora Duncan denounced in the evangelist Billy Sunday's hysterical diatribe: "That Bolshevik hussy who doesn't wear enough clothes to pad a crutch," have little in common. The famous French singer was speaking of the distinguished performer whom she had so often seen and admired; the fundamentalist ranter was speaking of a woman whom he had never even seen and only knew from newspaper caricatures and distortions.

Writing about the dancer and the contradictory views published about her, I have quoted on another occasion the remark of the French writer, Jules Renard: "We are apt to confuse the man and the artist on the pretext that hazard has united them in the same body." It seemed to me that the pattern of Isadora's fifty years was woven on a double loom. On one frame ran the design of her art, wholly unique and consistently fashioned with simplicity and moving beauty; on the other frame ran the fabric of her private life, as richly colorful as the first but with snarls and knots in the warp and woof. The design here was seldom symmetrical or complete—rather, perhaps, a succession of designs—and, if always original and striking, still continually marred by the often perverse hand of the weaver.

No dancer has ever been more extensively portrayed in line and sculptural form by the great artists of her time. Yet, even in these works, the eye may see either a beautiful figure, seemingly escaped from some ancient frieze, or a rather demented looking, Irish housemaid, prancing uninhibitedly and half-naked towards Bedlam. No dancer was more written about in poetry, perceptive prose, and pedestrian journalism. Surely, too, no stage personality ever spoke and wrote of her own art with such certainty or at such length, unworried by seeming contradictions. After all, did not her literary

idol Walt Whitman say: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, I contradict myself."

The mass of material at hand is staggering to consider. Since first meeting the dancer almost forty years ago, I have been collecting it: the paintings, drawings, photographs; the poems and critical articles; the memoirs of her contemporaries; the serious writings and *obiter dicta* of the extremely articulate artist herself. The piles of yellowing newspaper articles date back to 1899; some, still pristine and filled with factual errors and myths, were written only yesterday.

Out of all these various materials, together with my own memories and those of her friends and mine—mindful always of the fantastic vagaries of human recollection—I have tried to set down a clear picture of this unique artist and remarkable woman. Isadora Duncan, "a militant and mighty woman," as Max Eastman termed her, was "the symbol and veritable leader of those who put on their courage like armor and fought for the affirmation of life in America."

In writing this book it has seemed to me that the better part of biographical wisdom is to describe a life by adhering to the clearest possible chronological development. This was something to which Isadora herself paid little heed, and which sometimes makes for considerable confusion in her own lively book. "She didn't give a damn about dates," Gordon Craig said. Nor were fixed numbers or periods of time ever absolute: forty little pupils probably sounded more important than the actual twenty; a few months' stay, more or less, in a given locality, easily lengthened in retrospect to a rounded year; reasons for certain acts could always be unconsciously glorified later by lofty motives never even vaguely thought of at the moment of their happening, or they could be minimized into insignificance if necessary.

The eye of a detached onlooker often catches more revealing details of a happening than that of the emotionally involved participant, whether it be a great artistic event or an unimportant triviality. And yet it is sometimes dangerous to trust wholly to the onlooker's memory. An octogenarian Greek diplomat told me once of having seen the last performance of Isadora, whom he greatly admired ever since her first appearance in Greece in 1903. "She was wonderful," he said. "She danced completely nude—not lasciviously, mind you! She was like a great marble work of art!" She was indeed! But she

did not dance nude at that final performance in Paris or, for that matter, at any of the very many performances I ever witnessed in public or in private. I, too, was present at that Paris performance in July, 1927. She danced unforgettably, but she was not nude.

I have been chary, therefore, of personal memories, except where they could be matched and checked with factual accounts. For this I have leafed through contemporary periodicals, magazines, and programmes in the libraries of Europe and America. Where I have found myself caught up in a maze of contradictions, I have tried to set my course warily and to avoid taking as gospel what the subject herself, or her friends, have said as definitely "Thus" or "So". As Isadora herself wrote at length of her emotional life, I have sought to stress especially her artistic growth in the art for which she is celebrated today and which was her most important gift to the world.

ALLAN ROSS MACDOUGALL



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**Part I**  
**1878-1899**



**AMERICA**



## Chapter I



ISADORA! THE HAUNTING SYLLABLES OF THAT CHOSEN NAME SERVED to indicate to the world the American woman, who, during the first three decades of the century, appeared to her legion of admirers as the reincarnation of Terpsichore herself. In an age when the words *publicist* and *press agent* were not as common as they are now, by her nonconformist artistic and personal life she commanded pages of press attention, not always laudatory or understanding it must be admitted. And although the journalists and caricaturists were not always kind to her and could misspell her simple adopted name in a perplexing variety of ways—now Isadore, now Isidoro, now Izodora, etc., etc.—they never ignored her doings. She was hymned as a goddess by great poets and roundly anathematized by the more puritan members of the church. “The clergy,” once wrote the percipient Janet Flanner, “hearing of (though supposedly without ever seeing) her bare calf denounced it as violently as if it had been golden.” The great artists of two continents were delighted to limn her form and features, while the *hoi polloi* who usually coupled lewd with rude in rhyme, found her performances shocking, although well worth crowding in to watch. . . .

The waves of the wide Pacific Ocean, on whose coast she was born, were her rhythmic inspiration she claimed. As a dancer she sprang, she was fond of repeating, full-fledged from the head of Zeus.

With her lively imagination and her articulate tongue, she glibly spun many varied stories of her ancestors, her birth and early upbringing—stories which seldom jibed with the simple facts as we now know them. Not that these facts were, in themselves, undistinguished or uninteresting.

Both the maternal grandfather and the father of Isadora were outstanding men of their time; both were borne to California in the great gold rush of 1849, and both played important parts in building up that state. The grandfather, Thomas Gray, who had emigrated from Ireland in 1819, landed in Baltimore as a lad of sixteen. From Maryland he had pushed on to Ohio and then to Illinois. There he volunteered for service in the Black Hawk Wars and made the acquaintance of a fellow volunteer, Abraham Lincoln. On being mustered out he moved on to Missouri where he became a member of the State Legislature and through the patronage of the Polk Administration was later appointed to the post of Federal Collector of the Port of St. Louis.

Heeding the siren call of Eldorado, he and his family joined one of the covered wagon trains and made the arduous journey to San Francisco. Settled there, he brought up his large family. Between times he journeyed East to solicit a Federal appointment in the new state from his old friend, then President Lincoln. Arriving in Washington as the guns of Fort Sumter boomed out, he joined the Union forces with his son who was later killed in action. Mustered out with the rank of Colonel, he returned to San Francisco where he was given a Federal post as Naval Officer of the Port. Interested in politics, he was elected three times to represent San Francisco in the Californian State Legislature.

Sometime after his return to the West, the Colonel's youngest daughter, Mary Dora, married Joseph Charles Duncan, a union looked upon with disfavor by the puritanical Catholic Gray. For Duncan was much older than his new bride and had been, moreover, already married and was the father of four grown children. He was also well known as a charmer; his business ventures and Bohemian exploits were no secret in the growing town. He was one of the moving spirits of the recently founded Art Association, full of ideas which he could set forth with a lively tongue and pen, and—disquieting trait—he dabbled in poetry, specimens of which were occasionally

printed! Nor was his business background a model of stability; although by the time he sought the hand of Colonel Gray's teacher-daughter he was beginning his upward climb in the banking world after having had a bewildering series of trades and professions which seemed to change with each yearly edition of the city directory.

A direct descendant of General William Duncan of Philadelphia who had fought with Washington in the Revolutionary War, the foot-loose young Duncan had left his native city to go first to Illinois and thence to Louisiana where he worked on the *New Orleans Crescent*. During the '49 gold rush he left the settled certainties of New Orleans to establish a printing press in the chaotic jumping-off place of the ever-increasing gold rush hordes. This was later destroyed by one of the great fires that occasionally ravaged San Francisco in the pioneer days.

Following that mishap Duncan became in the early fifties a coproprietor of the famous Chinese Salesrooms where objects of art were sold to newly rich miners eager to exchange their nuggets for more spectacular evidences of wealth. To replenish his stock Duncan made a trip to Europe and returned with paintings and objects of art, each having a more or less exact historical and social pedigree attached to it. Following this venture, he became interested in real estate as an auctioneer, in editing *The Globe*, in owning and directing *The Home Journal*, and in working as a Recording Clerk at the Custom House.

The year 1860 found Duncan listed in the San Francisco Directory as Editor and Proprietor of *The California Home Journal* and Invoice Clerk at the Custom House. (It is interesting to note here that at one moment in this editorial period he gave a job as an apprentice typesetter to a young man who was later to make a name for himself in quite another field. Henry George, now known for his economic theories, was also destined to be the grandfather of another American dancer and choreographer, Agnes de Mille.)

During the following decade, until his marriage with the Colonel's daughter—the date cannot be set down with any exactitude, the vital statistics of the city having been destroyed during the earthquake and subsequent great fire of April, 1906—Duncan was engaged in a variety of occupations which finally led him into the fertile field of banking.

In 1869–70 there was organized in San Francisco the Pioneer Land

& Loan Association, with a capital of a million dollars. Joseph Charles Duncan was listed as Secretary of the new group. Later, in 1874, there was organized a Safe Deposit Company of San Francisco, the first institution of its kind in the West. It was housed in a newly constructed five-story building erected at the corner of California and Montgomery Streets. Begun in 1874, it was completed by the fall of 1875. Costing over two millions dollars, it was considered to be one of the finest buildings in the rapidly expanding city. A steel engraving of the period shows the great vault—with its 4,600 safes of various sizes which rented for from two dollars to twenty dollars a month—a spectacular octagonal structure embellished with eight spear-holding knights in armor set on pedestals.

Joseph Charles Duncan, it seems, was the projector of the scheme and the organizer of the company as well as its largest stockholder. His son-in-law, Benjamin Le Warne, was secretary. The Pioneer Land & Loan Bank of Savings, in which Duncan also had an interest, was organized and housed in the new building on the first floor.

At that time there was a rash of financial ventures all bent on siphoning off the loose cash of the newly rich. Such banking laws as existed were, to say the least, loosely applied. Law and business ethics were empty words. The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," was scrapped for the drossier rule of "Do others before they do you." The struggle for existence in the field of the mushrooming financial institutions was a ferocious jungle battle. To attract depositors, for instance, Duncan's bank offered an incredible twelve per cent interest while older and more solidly established houses paid only seven or eight per cent per annum.

But even with such attractive interest bait, the new banking interests found the going difficult. Duncan's mind, always fertile in ideas, thought up new methods of attracting money to attempt to steady his wobbling financial interests. On August 23, 1877, he organized the Union Bank with a million dollars capital stock. About a month later his Fidelity Savings Bank, with \$250,000 capital, was opened. The first never got beyond the organizing stage; the second lasted only one month before it was forced to close by the failure of the affiliated financial concerns on October 8th, 1877.

One of the officers of the new bank said there had never been more than \$900 on deposit. As for the older and larger bank, the cashier

admitted that there had seldom been more than \$8,000 on hand at any one time. Those in the know, therefore, were not surprised to read, in the *Daily Alta Californian*, the front-page headlines which sent hundreds of small depositors hammering in vain on the closed doors of the elegant building at the corner of California and Montgomery Streets:

#### FAILURE

The Pioneer Land & Loan Bank Suspends—  
A Not Unanticipated Event.

#### ABSCONDED

J. C. Duncan and his son-in-law Benjamin F. Le Warne Disappear  
from the City . . .  
The Couple Charged with Forgery & Felony.

Some of the depositors milling about the bank may have recalled the blurb biography of the man whom they held responsible for the loss of their savings. It had appeared two years before in a compilation of sketches called *Leading Men of San Francisco* and ended:

Mr. Duncan is the Manager of the Pioneer Bank and has built up that incorporation into a first class institution having the confidence of the community, and presenting a list of thirty-three hundred depositors.

Mr. Duncan's forte is business, and he is a fine specimen of American brains and energy. On every feature is written honesty, energy, and intelligence. His extraordinary success in business is due to his unconquerable energy and unbending integrity. As an editor, banker, and a citizen he has stood throughout his career an instance of that integrity and usefulness which afford the brightest example of individual worth.

From the moment of the bank failure, Duncan and his son-in-law were hunted men. There was a price of \$6,000 on the elder man's head. Yet despite this and the constant agitation by furious and frustrated depositors, it was not until the following year that the two fugitives were apprehended by the police. Before this there occurred a seriocomic attempt to escape from the city by boat.

Nagged by the constant complaints of their inefficiency or unwillingness to arrest Duncan, the police finally got wind of their quarries' intention of sailing away to South America in the middle of February, 1878. They were tipped off that the two wanted men were going to board the fast barkentine, the *Ellen J. McKinnan*, bound for Corinto, Nicaragua. Chief Detective Captain Isaiah W.

Lees and a squad of policemen boarded the vessel. Duncan's luggage was found there, but apparently as the policemen had climbed up the port side the wanted men had departed in a tug on the star-board side. Hot on the trail, Captain Lees arrested Duncan on February 23rd in the house of a Mrs. White, a dressmaker, where he was discovered hiding in a closet. The good woman said she had harbored the accused out of sympathy for his daughters. A week later Le Warne was captured in Oakland.

Duncan was tried four times. Three times the jury could not agree after hearing innumerable witnesses, many of whom disagreed, had convenient lapses of memory, or blandly perjured themselves. At the fourth trial the impatient judge directed a Not Guilty verdict. Upon his release Joseph Charles Duncan departed for Los Angeles to seek a new fortune and a new wife, leaving his distracted second wife to fend for herself and her three youngsters, and await the child she was soon to bear.



## Chapter II



THE FUTURE ISADORA WAS BORN ON MAY 27<sup>TH</sup> IN THE YEAR 1878. The event took place in a fine house on the corner of Geary and Taylor Streets in San Francisco. For the time being this was one of the very few fine things left to the broken Duncan family after the flight to Los Angeles of the erstwhile banker-father. The child was given the name of the mother, Dora, to which was added that of Angela. (The origin of the name by which the theatre-going publics of America and Europe were later to know her has never been satisfactorily elucidated; nor has the exact date of its first use ever been set down with any certainty. Her programmed first name in the first Daly production in which she appeared on Broadway was printed as Sara Duncan.)

Like the vital statistics of her parents' marriage, those of the four children also disappeared in the great 1906 conflagration that swept over her native city after the earthquake. It was not until January 3, 1947, that the birth dates of the four Duncan children were legally established. Augustin Duncan, then visiting his native city, went before Superior Judge Edward Murphy for that purpose. According to his testimony, the first born was Mary Elizabeth, on November 8, 1871. Augustin—the final “e” was dropped early in his career—was born on April 17, 1873; while his brother Raymond followed on November 1, 1874. The birthdate of Dora Angela was given as May 27, 1878.

No one has been able to say with any certitude, as Shakespeare's Beatrice said, if a star danced the night the future Isadora was born. She herself was fond of pointing out that she was born under the astrological sign of the Twins and always maintained, when telling of her beginnings, that she really began dancing in her mother's womb! And after she had danced her way into the world she wrote that her first clear sensual recollection of her early days was of being thrown out of the window of the house of her birth, which was going up in flames. "*Always*," she wrote in the first draft of her autobiography which she began in Moscow in 1923, "*Always fire and water and sudden fearful death.*"

Most of her other childhood memories—not always happy or care-free ones—were to center in East Oakland. For it was to that then sparsely populated small town across the San Francisco Bay that Mrs. Duncan moved with her father-bereft brood. There, divorced from her errant banker husband and deprived of his material support, she earned a precarious livelihood. As an accomplished musician she went out to the houses of her richer neighbors to give piano lessons. In the leisure left from this itinerant task she stayed at home to labor at ill-paid knitting. As the children grew older they aided as best they could to supplement the meager family income. Raymond, for instance, was listed one year in the Oakland Directory as being employed in the railroad yards. And the young Dorita recalled peddling her harassed mother's handiwork from door to door. She remembered, too, often awakening at dawn "in the still cold house" to see the weary-eyed Mrs. Duncan still busy knitting on some piece of work which had to be finished.

The early years were "a perpetual state of terror . . . of disagreeable landlords . . . asking for the rent, and a continual changing of address from one lodging or small cottage to another." She was later to recall, speaking of these days: "The general unpleasantness of life as being a normal condition. And a continual going to school with leaking shoes and unsatisfied stomach." Nights, too, when "our pillows were often wet with the tears of children who go to bed hungry."

When, as a world-famous figure, she finally returned to her birthplace, almost a quarter of a century after she and her mother had left, she made the ritual nostalgic return to the scenes of her early

childhood in both San Francisco and East Oakland. It took her almost a whole day in a hired car to tour round looking for the various places where the Duncan clan had held together in poverty. The two small rooms on Sunpath Avenue; the place on 23rd Street; the small house on 17th Street; the residences on 4th, 10th, and 22nd, and all the different addresses where again and "again the unkind landlord became disagreeable, and we moved to . . ."

Yet there was a leavening to the otherwise poverty-blotched existence. If toys and dolls can't be bought, they can be made by imaginative children; games can be invented and played in a way undreamed of by a trained games teacher; the straggling children of the neighborhood can be gathered together to become the first of the dancer's pupils; home newspapers can be produced; the interior countrysides can become fairylands filled with magic when seen through the eyes of foot-loose lively youngsters, vying with each other to find ways to brighten their drab existence.

Material misery could always be drowned, or partially forgotten, the children soon learned, in the waves of their own childish gaiety contrived during the long hours when Mrs. Duncan's absence left them to their own devices. In the evenings, gathered together round their mother when she came home, and if she were not completely exhausted, they could always be transported into other realms of beautiful sounds and rhythmic felicity by her playing and reading to them. Mrs. Duncan, by now self-freed from the rigid doctrines of her Catholic upbringing, initiated her youngsters into the lyric joys of the pagan *Rubaiyat* or the works of the classic poets and the libertarian prose of the agnostic Ingersoll. Music and the spoken word shed an unforgettable radiance over their childhood, and continued to glow long after the music had ceased.

One other source of happiness, one other escape from the banalities of everyday life, open to the growing girl was that of reading. This she shared unknowingly with another growing girl two years her senior, one who like herself was to make a name in Europe and America. Coincident with the arrival of the Duncan family in Oakland was that of another named Stein. In 1880 they had migrated from the eastern seaboard to settle by the Golden Gate. But this affluent German-Jewish family, living in a well-established house, surrounded with eight or ten acres of tended fields and orchards, had

very little in common with the indigent, rootless clan, always seemingly on the move from one clapboard cottage to another cheap flat.

Yet the dumpling-like "Gerty" and the elfin "Dorita" had their love of the written word in common. To Isadora could be applied what Miss Stein was to write later of herself: "She read anything that was printed that came her way and a great deal came her way . . ." Both were faithful visitors to the Oakland Public Library whose librarian at that period was a red-haired, soft-eyed poet named Ina Donna Coolbrith. This lady already had one claim to local fame: she was known as the first white child to enter California through the Beckwourth Pass. Later she was to achieve a greater measure of fame by being crowned with laurels as the first poet laureate of California. Already on intimate terms with such figures as Bret Harte and Mark Twain, she was also rumored to have been the "friend" of the flamboyant Western poet Joaquin Miller. It was said that it was she who had persuaded him to drop his real first names of Cincinnatus Heine and adopt that of Joaquin, before setting out to make a splash in the literary duck ponds of London and Paris.

Beloved as she was by the writers and artists who frequented her salon, Miss Coolbrith was worshipped by the children who came to her by day for advice and guidance in their reading. The little "Dorita" was especially drawn to her and the librarian returned her affection. Was not the eager girl the daughter of the man who had been "the love of her life" as she confessed in her old age to a young journalist in San Francisco? To Samuel Dickson she described the erstwhile banker as being "so gentle, so great an idealist and so fine a poet."

For Joseph Duncan, in the midst of his multifarious commercial, social and cultural activities, found time to write verse. Some of these period pieces are still slumbering in forgotten anthologies and periodicals. In *Outcroppings*, published anonymously by Bret Harte in 1866, may be read a many-versed effusion named "The Intaglio, Lines on a beautiful antique." One verse might be cited as a brief sample of Duncan's poetic gift:

*Yet the carved gem remaining  
Tells us of that Golden Age,  
And bids Memory's face restore us  
Light to read her brightest page.*

Though the father's poetic talent may be a moot point, there can be no question that his family inherited his love of poetry and beauty, as well as his restlessness and his "gift of gab." Nor can there be any question about the part the mother played in fostering this love. Nor any about the fact that Isadora from her earliest years read and digested the writings of the world's great poets and thinkers. There were no infantile comic books in those days; and the world's literary classics, born of the mental and spiritual travail of genius, were not yet being pared down and butchered by journeymen hacks for lazy or hurried readers.

It was not for show that the young dancer, starting her professional career in Daly's Theatre years later, might be seen reading a well-thumbed translation of Marcus Aurelius to while away the tedium of back-stage waits; or that in later years there was always to be found on her bedside table a volume of Nietzsche. To those who knew her well she was certainly not, as Merle Armitage has slightly dismissed her, the "daughter of a semi-Bohemian San Francisco family [who] carried along with her a jackdaw nest of half-read, partially understood books . . ." In her maturity she delighted in the company of poets and philosophers and they did not scorn her store of knowledge.

Given her voracious appetite for the printed word, one may be allowed to wonder in passing if the teen-aged Miss Duncan, who in the pages of the Oakland Directory for 1892-3 was listed as a dancing teacher, might not have read the well-known book on social dancing by Allen Dodworth. This work, *Dancing and Its Relation to Educational and Social Life, with a New Method of Instruction*, had been published by Harper & Brothers in 1885 and had gone through many editions. In any event, Dora A. (and Mary E. also listed as a dancing teacher at the same address) conducted dancing classes for both children and grown-ups in the Duncan home at 1365 Eighth Street, Oakland.

One of the grown-ups who attended these dancing classes recalled them many years afterwards with nostalgic amusement. Speaking to a friend in the Café du Dôme in Montparnasse after the death of Isadora, Leo Stein reminisced of his early days in East Oakland. As a freshman at the University of California in nearby Berkeley, he remembered his dread of the forthcoming "prom" for he knew

nothing about ballroom dancing and so had decided not to attend the affair. He confided his decision to a sympathetic classmate who told him that learning to dance was "as easy as falling off a log." All he had to do, his friend advised him, was to take some lessons from the two little "Irishers," the Duncan girls, down on Eighth Street. They were known to be wonderful teachers. In no time at all they would teach him all the elementary steps of the Polka, the Schottische, the Mazurka, the Waltz, and any other fancy dance that might be on the programme of the "Prom." For him, he said as an old man, the Duncanesque initiation into "the rhythmic mysteries of gracefully moving a taut body across the ballroom floor" was an experience he long remembered with pleasure.

Another writer, retelling the memories of his childhood, also recalls the Duncan dancing classes. In his book *San Francisco, A Pageant*, Charles Caldwell Dobie says:

I can remember the first time I ever saw Isadora Duncan. She was not thrilling an audience at that time with her grace and fire. She was prosaically teaching a line of self-conscious girls and reluctant boys the steps of the polka. I had the good fortune . . . of being one of the reluctant boys. Later I used to see her and her sister Elizabeth through the classroom windows of a school they had opened in the old Castle Mansion at Van Ness Avenue and Sutter Street. When they had abandoned this venture . . . I went through the house on some pretext. The hardwood mantels all over the house had been chopped away. Had this been the work of vandals or had there been grievous need of firewood in a household always on the verge of penury?

## Chapter III



THE CASTLE MANSION, THROUGH WHOSE WINDOWS DOBIE MENTIONS having seen the Duncan sisters giving their dancing lessons, was undoubtedly the house which the errant father had bought for his second family in San Francisco sometime in 1893. In the San Francisco Directory for 1894 the whole Duncan family, with the exception of Miss Dora, is listed individually as residing at the house on the northeast corner of Sutter and Van Ness. After each name (including those of the two male members of the family) is listed: "Teacher of Dancing." The youngest Duncan's name later appears in the 1895 edition of the Directory as Teacher of Dancing.

In a short memoir published in a Los Angeles newspaper, Jackson A. Graves, a lawyer and banker and one of the earliest settlers in the booming Los Angeles, tells of his association with Duncan. He remembers him as a "dapper, energetic, medium-sized old man" who after his precipitous departure from San Francisco, was indulging in a variety of money-making ventures. At one period after settling in the southern Californian city he apparently was on the way to making another fortune. On a \$4,000 note he borrowed \$2,000 from Mr. Graves, explaining that he wanted the money to buy a house for the family he had left in San Francisco. The title to the newly bought house, writes Graves, the dapper old man shrewdly held in his own name. It was not for nothing that Duncan knew from long experi-

ence how fickle fortune could be; he might have pressing need one day for the money invested in the house.

The need came very shortly afterwards; but for the brief period the Bohemian family had possession of the grand house and made full use of it. The spacious public rooms were ideal for the dancing classes they specialized in. And on the grounds there was a carriage house—a barn, as described by Isadora—which the stage-struck Augustine converted into a little theatre. There the four Duncans staged plays of their own devising and were able to form a small troupe which went up and down the peninsula and in the hinterlands giving variety performances in small towns. For in those pre-radio and pre-TV days people in small towns were pleased to accept for their entertainment the fare offered by the summer Chautauquas or the winter Town Hall itinerant troupes.

During the years when the children were growing up, the lively, cosmopolitan city by the Golden Gate was known to all drama and music lovers for the varied excellence of its cultural fare. German and Italian operatic companies were always assured of rapt audiences; the golden-voiced Sarah Bernhardt was heard in the famous plays of her repertory and her colleagues from the Comédie Française, Coquelin and Jane Hading, were as warmly welcomed as she; the great Salvini and his company, all the way from Italy, were cheered by their immigrant compatriots as well as the native theatregoers; the American companies of Ada Rehan, Modjeska, Richard Mansfield, among many others less well-known, and the London Lyceum Theatre company of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry played Shakespeare and contemporary plays by American and English dramatists to intelligently appreciative audiences.

Nor were the world-famous actors alone warmly welcomed. All the great musical virtuosi of the late nineteenth century delighted in the reception which always awaited them on the Pacific Coast. The vaudevillians had their own cheering, crowded audiences and that particularly American delight, the platform-lecturer-culture-bringer, found an eager public not always predominantly feminine. Sir Edwin Arnold, K.C.I.E.S.C.I., could draw huge crowds to hear his reading of *The Light of Asia*, as could the more controversial and much greater publicized Oscar Wilde. Lesser known figures could always find paying listeners to hear elucidations of the “mod-



ern" poetry of Robert Browning or attend demonstrations of the latest aesthetic craze of Delsarte.

Delsarte! That name and what it stood for in the last century means very little today to the average reader. It will not be found in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. A Frenchman will look blankly at one when questioned about his famous nineteenth-century compatriot. Famous, that is—and misunderstood—in America. He will not find the name in his handy *Larousse*. If he is curious enough, however, to take down the *Grande Encyclopédie* in the Bibliothèque Nationale he will find: "DELSARTE, François, Alexandre, Nicolas, Cheri, singing teacher. Born Solesme, (Nord) 19th November 1811; died Paris, 20th July, 1871. Delsarte was an eminent professor who joined to a great poetical and musical comprehension, a serious knowledge of the anatomy of the larynx and of human physiology."

And what has this to do with the beginnings of Isadora Duncan? Well, there can be no doubt, that the young lady in San Francisco learned at third or fourth hand about Delsarte from one of the visiting lecturers or from a book. In a brief memoir of Isadora Duncan spoken over the BBC, the eminent octogenarian artist and theatrical personality, Gordon Craig, told of going through a trunk belonging to his friend, the dancer, in 1905. Hunting for some books he had lent her, he came across a book by Delsarte, he recalls. As Delsarte had not written any book it was more probably one of the many books written by teachers of the so-called Delsarte "system" who had never even known the Frenchman, or what he actually taught.

As late as 1925, Isadora herself once told a young admirer, Walter Shaw, who questioned her about Delsarte, that on her professional cards at that period in San Francisco, there was printed "Professor of Delsarte." She also laughingly said she didn't know what it was all about! Later when she had arrived in New York she was quoted in an article, "Emotional Expression" which appeared in an ephemeral magazine *The Director*, as affirming: "Delsarte, the master of all principles of flexibility, and lightness of body, should receive universal thanks for the bonds he has removed from our constrained members. His teachings, faithfully given combined with the usual instruction necessary to learning the dance, will give a result exceptionally graceful and charming."

Whatever instruction she received in the so-called Delsarte method, or whatever books she read on the subject, apparently omitted telling her anything about the Frenchman himself. So little that, according to a member of her family, when she finally arrived in Paris in 1900 the first personality to whom she wished to pay homage was Delsarte. Apparently she had never been told that he had died almost thirty years before; indeed he had been dead before she was born!

A clue as to how the name of the then well-known French voice teacher came to be associated in America with posing and dancing may be found in the two-volume work *Epoch*. This is the thoroughly documented life of Steele MacKaye, the genial dramatist and inventive genius of the American theatre of the nineteenth century by his poet-dramatist son, Percy MacKaye. In the course of his narrative MacKaye tells how his father, then a handsome young Shakespearean actor, wishing to enter the Théâtre de la Comédie Française in Paris, was taken to the French capital in 1869.

Once there the MacKaye family were persuaded, instead of sending the ambitious young man to study voice production with the famous Regnier at the Conservatoire Nationale, to enroll him as a pupil with the eminent teacher, François Delsarte. The French master was much taken with the gifted young American and treated him as his own son. (Delsarte's third son, Xavier, had been struck down by cholera, leaving the father inconsolable.) When, because of the impending Franco-Prussian War, the MacKaye family returned to America in 1870, young Steele MacKaye kept in touch with his esteemed teacher and was encouraged to prepare the way for a future lecture tour for him.

In New York the young actor opened a school in his family's house in Greenwich Village, and later at 23 Union Square, then the theatrical center of the town, he established the *Conservatoire Aesthétique and School of Expression*. There, besides teaching his master's methods of voice production, he also taught a system of Harmonious Gymnastics, all grouped together under the magic foreign name of Delsarte. As Percy MacKaye has observed, Delsarte was chiefly concerned with vocal, not visual, expression. The bodily and facial expressions later mistermind Delsartism were really, it would

appear, the creative addition of Steele MacKaye to his master's methods.

Delsartism, however, became the rage in New York. Delsarte robes, Delsarte corsets, garters, and other pieces of female finery had a vogue. And when MacKaye had given up his conservatory to devote himself to playwriting, acting, and stagecraft inventions, his erstwhile pupils went out into the highways and byways to lecture on the "Science" and the "Philosophy" of Delsarte. Some wrote books to supplement their lectures and lessons.

Some of these Delsartean lecturers went as far afield as London. Among the most talked about at that period—the Eighties and Nineties—was the Russel couple. Edmund Russel was billed in London as a teacher of Expression, Interior Decoration, and Art, and always appeared in loose colorful clothes and maroon leather Persian sandals embellished with silver. His wife, Henrietta, was also a lecturer on dress reform as well as Delsarte and wore loose-fitting Greek gowns with no corset. They were known as the High Priest and Priestess of Delsarte and claimed that Robert Browning and Gladstone were both interested in their Delsartean system of speaking and orating. While in London they gave lessons to private pupils who came to them from the Drury Lane Theatre, the Covent Garden Opera House, and the Carl Rosa Opera Company, as well as to various London actors, singers, clergymen and lawyers. In New York, Mrs. Wanamaker gave Delsartean "At Homes" at which President Harrison's wife and the wife and daughter of his vice president, among others, would receive lessons from Henrietta Russel.

One of the best-sellers of the period, *The Delsarte System of Expression*, first published in 1885, was by an elocution teacher, Genevieve Stebbins, who had had no connection with the French master. The opening lesson of her book "Decomposing Exercises" did not mean any odoriferous play, as the layman might imagine; rather it was a kind of exercise in relaxation before getting into the strenuous business of suiting the Delsartean action to the word. Another chapter was on walking (did you ever see a larynx walking?), and one was on "The Grammar of Pantomime." Later editions of this work were illustrated with photographic reproductions of Greek sculpture. (Here one may wonder if the future Greek dancer out in Oakland had ever come across this book in her reading bouts.)

Other added chapters in the later editions had such headings as "Identity of Principles Underlying Greek Statues and the Delsarte System of Expression," "Artistic Statue Posing," and "Pantomime." Small wonder that the daughter of Delsarte, Madame Delsarte-Gerald, when she visited America in 1892, was horrified at seeing the gesticulations and the facial muggings that passed as her father's system only two decades after his death.

The well-known teacher and dancer Ted Shawn, in a recent effort to flog into life the Victorian dead horse of Delsartism, tells of his frustrated efforts to consult the mass of material on the Frenchman and his work in the possession of the Louisiana State University. Dr. C. L. Shaver, the curator of the collection, would not grant permission to him, or indeed to anyone outside the graduate body, to consult or examine the material. He made the point that as Delsarte's career had been devoted to the singing and speaking voice, the material could therefore be of no value to a dancer!

Since the depositing of the Delsarte material in the Louisiana State University, many graduates have written their theses on various aspects of the Frenchman's life and labors. In one of these there is an interesting tabulation of Delsarte's students in Paris. Of the 96 traced, 22 were singers, 18 instrumentalists; the remainder in 3's and 4's were composers, priests, lawyers, authors, etc., etc. Apparently no dancer ever studied with Delsarte, and the one American listed is the actor, Steele MacKaye!

Apart from Isadora's own admission of being a Professor of Delsarte—there is no evidence as to who conferred this scholastic title or indeed how long she studied the so-called "science" and the like "philosophy" of the Frenchman to obtain it—it can be safely assumed that in these early years she was greatly influenced by the posing, elocutionary methods of the Delsarte-Steele MacKaye disciples. In her own book she tells that one of her first dances was Longfellow's "I shot an arrow into the air," a poem taught to generations of American school children with the appropriate accompanying gestures. And were not her first solo performances in a New York theatre in 1899 a series of plastic poses to the various stanzas of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam read by her sister?

Long before Isadora and her mother reached New York, however, they dallied a while in Chicago. In an account of those early days in

the Windy City, the *Chicago Tribune* of November 29th, 1908, tells of the arrival "with various heirlooms in the form of rare old laces and jewels. Among her first experiences was the disposal of some of the beautiful laces. Cash was needed to pay expenses."

The article continues: ". . . Miss Duncan had been given a letter by the Press Club of San Francisco to the Press Club of Chicago. This letter proved the means of winning friends and good luck. At the Chicago Press Club she was welcomed. Ike Fleming espoused the cause of the little girl forthwith. He introduced Isadora into 'Old Bohemia,' an aggregation of artists, writers, actors, musicians, and other bright lights of the circles of achievement—and picturesquely ruled by its queen, the beloved 'Amber.'"

In the carefree atmosphere of the Bohemian club, the vivacious girl from the West found good friends all eager to help her. One in particular, stresses the *Chicago Tribune* account, was a North Shore woman "versed in 'thought prose' and the adaptation of motion to music." Out of this sympathetic friendship came an opportunity to "show what she could do" at the Masonic Roof Garden whose vaudeville entertainment was managed by Charles Fair. He presented the newcomer as "The Californian Faun" at a weekly salary of twenty dollars, and for three weeks she entertained the music-hall audiences with her simple steps.

At the end of her brief engagement, a Mr. Harry Bowers introduced her to Arnold Daly, then in Chicago with his theatrical company. "This meeting," records the *Tribune*, "happened in the theatre just when the orchestra was preparing its final exit. Mr. Daly called a wait upon the musicians, and two or three consented to remain and give Isadora a chance to exhibit her Terpsichorean interpretations. Mr. Daly was sufficiently impressed to offer her an engagement in New York if she arrived in the eastern city at a given date. Isadora arrived promptly. . . ."

## Chapter IV



IT IS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE THAT THE TEEN-AGE GIRL UPON FIRST MEETING the great Daly treated him to the great harangue on her discovery of the "Dance" which she quotes in all seriousness and at great length in her book. Nevertheless her freshness made a strong enough impression on the famous theatrical manager to cause him to engage her for the opening show of his fall season in New York. This was to be *Miss Pygmalion*, a pantomime with music by Francis Thomé which had had much success in Paris. The leading lady was Mademoiselle Jane May, a noted French mime, whom Daly was introducing to American theatregoers.

From the beginning of October until the show opened on November 18th, the young Californian rehearsed, naturally without compensation, as was the custom in those far-off days before Actors Equity was formed. To add to the increasing hardship of long weeks of working without any money, were occasional furious slaps from the leading lady, for the French artiste was a female with a prima donna's temper who did not relish her American subordinates' lack of knowledge of the finer points of continental art.

To the young dancer billed as Sara Duncan, pantomime was not an art. The part she was given to play seemed to her to be "very stupid and quite unworthy" of her "ambitions and ideals." Even at

that early stage in her professional career she could match or even surpass any visiting star in her feeling of self-importance. She told later, looking back on this experience, that she always longed to say of pantomime:

"If you want to speak, why don't you speak? Why all this effort to make gestures as in a deaf and dumb asylum?" This despite the fact that at the height of her success some of her greatest admirers found her sense of pantomime one of the most thrilling elements of her own dance creations. And none of her intimate friends can ever forget their helpless fits of laughter when their hostess would enliven an evening by doing a mimed parody of an old-fashioned silent movie, especially one starring Theda Bara, one of her bêtes noires.

The peculiarly continental art of pantomime was apparently not to be the liking of the New York theatregoers either. The *Times* noted that the exotic art of pantomime did not appeal to the American audience. It disliked the "excess of gesticulation" of the star and remarked that it was "as foreign to the life we live as the symbolism of the Chinese theatre." After a week the show was forced to go on the usual road tour which followed all New York theatrical attractions. Two months in the hinterlands were not any more successful for the show, and the young dancer returned to New York at the beginning of 1896 to join Daly's Shakespearean repertory company, headed by the star Ada Rehan, which was about to make a trans-continental tour. A series of programmes in the possession of the San Francisco Library shows that the distinguished actress was presented in her repertory by Mr. Daly at the Baldwin Theatre there in May and June of 1896. In the cast of characters of the programme of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the name of the famous actress does not appear, but the observant reader may note that the parts of "Two Dancing Fairies" are played by a Miss Converse and a Miss Duncan.

Upon returning to New York for the fall season that year, the young dancer was given a small part in Daly's production of *The Geisha*, which had already been successfully launched in London. Isadora acted one of the four attendants in the teahouse but was not programmed. When this closed on November 22nd, after having run from September 9th, rehearsals were already in progress for Daly's

new and elaborate production for Miss Rehan of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*. In this Isadora danced with three other gypsies, accompanying the serenade "Sigh no more ladies."

On March 12th of the following year, 1897, she danced in the Prologue of *Meg Merrilies*, a dramatization of Sir Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* which the then popular novelist Robert W. Chambers had devised. Later in the year when Daly decided to take his company over to tour the principal cities of Great Britain, the young dancer went along. Although Isadora had apparently forgotten that first visit to England when she wrote her book, the article in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1908 reports it in the following manner: "Mr. Daly, ever quick to recognize subtle talent and the theatrical advantage of it, sent Isadora to Europe to go into artistic training under famous masters of thought expression through adaptation of motion to music."

Whether Isadora went as a member of the Daly company, or was sent alone for a Terpsichorean education, it seems to be a fact, according to family recollections, that she did study with Ketti Lanner, the famous leading dancer of the Empire Theatre in London. That lady, incidentally, claimed to have been in her youth in Vienna a pupil of the great ballerina Fanny Elssler. Isadora's study with her was brought to light in an interview given by Augustin Duncan while visiting his native city in 1947.

Taking note of the repeated assertions made by uninformed balletomanes that his famous sister had never had any lessons in dancing, Duncan remarked that his sister had studied with both Marie Bonfanti and Ketti Lanner. It should be noted in passing that Isadora's own openly expressed scorn of the gymnastic and acrobatic tricks of the ballet dance encouraged her balletic detractors in denouncing her supposed lack of what they consider true dance training. In any event, Isadora studied with Ketti Lanner in London during the summer of 1897 when she was nineteen, and probably continued taking lessons in New York with Signora Marie Bonfanti.

Elizabeth, the strictly pedagogical member of the Duncan family, had opened a dancing school in one of the Carnegie Hall studios on West 57th Street. It was listed in the New York Directory as *May Duncan's School of Dancing*, and further downtown, in Union Square, the former prima ballerina of the *Black Crook*, the aging



Marie Bonfanti, conducted her own school of the dance. With the limited number of dancing teachers then operating in Manhattan, it is not inconceivable that the Duncan girls and the Franco-Italian star turned teacher were well enough acquainted for Isadora to know of her and take lessons from her.

A Miss Lola Yberri, a long-since-forgotten music-hall headliner, "the graceful classic dancer who is now appearing at the Orpheum," told the reporter of a San Francisco newspaper in March of 1903: "Marie Bonfanti, who was my teacher in New York, was also the teacher of Miss Duncan. Though I never saw her dance [I] do not think she was much of a success at first. . . . She danced some kind of classic dance while Justin Huntly McCarthy read the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. Prior to that she had been a chorus girl in one of Mr. Daly's companies. Then she was taken up by Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish and other rich people so that she soon became the fad of the rich set. She went in for Greek dances such as I dance and also for other ancient posturings."

But before her *Rubaiyat* performances and before she had become, as the June 1899 *Broadway Magazine* termed her in an elaborately illustrated article, "The only real Society Pet," the nineteen-year-old Isadora had taken one more step on her way to fame. Having made the acquaintance of the young composer Ethelbert Nevin (back from a sojourn in Europe and settled in an adjoining Carnegie Studio) she was invited to take part in a concert of his latest compositions which was arranged for the afternoon of the 24th of March, 1898, in the Carnegie Lyceum. The *Musical Courier* of a week later gives a very brief account of the matinee, telling that Nevin played four solos and that a Mrs. Wyman sang eight Nevin songs, one of them being "The Rosary," its first public performance. The paragraph ended: "Miss Isadora Duncan illustrated very gracefully three dances. . . ." For the record these were "Narcissus," "Water-Nymphs," and "Ophelia."

The first of these was apparently kept in the dancer's repertoire. The Valse Lyrique "Souvenir à Duncan," a musical potpourri composed by B. Keyll during the dancer's first visit to St. Petersburg in January 1905 as a "Hommage à la Grande Artiste Miss Isadora Duncan," opens with an *andante con moto* ("Narcissus" von E. Nevin) and continues with some themes from the various Chopin compo-

sitions she was dancing at that period. Except for the occasional presence of Nevin's slightly tinkling Narcissus in the dancer's programmes for the next few years, and her expression of admiration for her young compatriot's musical talent, there seems to have been no sequel to the Nevin concert.

During the summer months of that year, the society patronesses of the Duncan Dancing School and their fellow-members of New York's "400" left the city as was their custom, to pass the season at their country estates. Many of these fabulous places were either at Lenox, in the Berkshires, or at Newport by the sea. Mrs. Daniel Chester French, the wife of the well-known sculptor of the period, tells of the Duncan sisters appearing at alfresco parties at the French home in Lenox. Other social chroniclers tell of Isadora's dancing on the lawns of Newport estates during the summer. A newspaper photograph of the period shows a large crowd of summering guests at Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont's estate in Newport seated on the lawn. Before them Isadora is posing while her sister Elizabeth stands to one side reading; Mrs. Duncan is seen seated at the piano as the accompanist.

In her memoirs, *A Backward Glance*, Edith Wharton tells of being invited to a garden party in Newport by a Miss Mason of Boston to see Isadora Duncan dance. The name meant nothing to her. As for the dancing: "Only two kinds of dancing were familiar to that generation," she says, "waltzing in the ballroom and pirouetting on the stage." The author hated pirouetting and refused Miss Mason's invitation. Unhappily so, for we thus miss what might have been an excellent description from Mrs. Wharton's pen and which might have served as a companion to the one she gives of Isadora's dancing which she finally saw a few years later, in Paris.

## Chapter V



ENTERTAINMENT SEEKERS READING THE NEW YORK NEWSPAPERS IN March, 1899, might have come across a photograph of a charming young girl, arms and neck bare, in a lacy dress and ribbon-tied ballet slippers. The caption reads:

### DANCE A POEM

While the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam is read by Justin Huntly McCarthy, Miss Isadora Duncan interprets the lines by pose and dance. . . . A feature of the forthcoming Lenten matinees at the Lyceum Theatre.

Or under a similar, but differently posed photograph taken by the then well-known photographer Jacob Schloss:

### SOCIETY'S FAVORITE DANCER

Who had the Good Luck to Create Something Absolutely Novel in the Way of Dancing. Miss Duncan Illustrates by Graceful Gestures the Poetry as it is Read by a Deep-voiced Man Behind the Curtains. She Threatens to Invade Society Abroad.

A longer advance notice told the public that:

Thursday March 14th at the Lyceum at 3:30 an entertainment termed "An Afternoon with Omar Khayyam the Astronomer-Poet of Persia" Justin Huntley McCarthy will lecture on the poet and verses from the Rubaiyat will be done into dance by Miss Isadora Duncan. By doing poetry into dance, Miss Duncan, an energetic young woman who had

been identified with society for some time, has won prominence by her originality. Her dancing has been called "Startlingly original but thoroughly artistic."

In her preliminary skirmishes with Omar, the stanzas posingly interpreted by Isadora had been read by her sister Elizabeth or her actor-brother, Augustin. On one of these occasions she had been seen by McCarthy then visiting New York with his wife Cissie Loftus. Miss Loftus was an English actress then playing in New York; for many years later she was to continue as a favorite both on the British and the American stage as a distinguished Shakespearean actress and as an accomplished mimic on the music-hall stage. McCarthy, the son of an Irish politician known as an historian and writer, was himself a writer. Famous in the early twentieth century as the author of the successful play *If I Were King*, he was, when he met Isadora, the author of a prose rendering of the work already widely known through FitzGerald's popular poetic adaptation.

For those interested, FitzGerald's stanza beginning: "A book of verses underneath the bough," became in McCarthy's heavy-handed prose: "Give me a flagon of red wine, a book of verses, a loaf of bread and a little idleness. If with such store I might sit by thy dear side in some lonely place, I should deem myself happier than a king in his kingdom." Yet Isadora, loving poetry as she did and having been brought up by her mother on the FitzGerald quatrains, no doubt thought that the English writer's name and his ability to lecture on the Persian poet were drawing cards of importance for her Lyceum Theatre matinee.

Mr. McCarthy, together with the young dancer, certainly drew a large and interested audience, mostly of women as theatrical matinees usually are. Well-dressed, well-fed, well-corseted, well-bred women, very proper ladies indeed, there to do honor to a poet whose pagan poem probably lay on their drawing room tables bound, as was the fashion, in limp leather. Settling down as placidly comfortable as they could, the ladies listened to Mr. McCarthy's rich Anglo-Irish voice lecture them on the life and times of the Persian poet. When he began to read his version of Omar's words and a slip of a girl—a hussy, some termed her later—came forward to illustrate the words with her pretty poses, many of the staid, more Victorian members

of the high-brow audience received a galvanic shock. The creature before them had not only bare arms and neck, but when her legs—pardon, limbs—stretched out from under the lacy frock, they too were bare!

The youth of today find it difficult to conceive of the vestimentary conditions imposed on performers over fifty years ago. No actress would have dared to appear then on the stage with any part of her anatomy save the face uncovered. Accustomed as we now are to seeing figures—both male and female—parading on a public beach clad in the most abbreviated bikinis or slips, we find it droll that for well into the twentieth century ladies went trippingly into the sea covered from neck to toe-tip with voluminous garments which left everything to the imagination. Even in the privacy of the home, the proper attire for sleep had to cover the body from the neck to the wrists and to beyond the ankles. The “limbs” of the Steinway were covered, and in conversation among gentlefolk such a word as “leg” was indecent and unutterable.

In one newspaper account of the performance, the dancer’s partner was exonerated:

It was no fault of Mr. McCarthy’s that certain society women of New York got up and left the theatre. . . . Mr. McCarthy was properly garbed and conducted himself in every respect as an elocutionist and a gentleman should. Notwithstanding this, a matron arose, and giving a horrified look at Miss Duncan’s beautiful bare arms and lovely legs, unchecked and unobscured by stockings, left the house. She was followed by a bunch of vestals, and within five minutes as many as forty women had withdrawn. . . .

An admirer of the young dancer described her as follows:

When she stood still she was like a Greek statue in grace of classic outlines. But she had neither the color nor the immobility of marble. Her arms were bare to the shoulders and her legs to the knees had the same semblance. Her first costume provided a nondescript gown between those two levels. Her performance was well within the limits of good art. Her pose and movements were often eloquent with the ideas which were being read and in delightful unison with the music which was being played. After a while she changed her dress to one somewhat longer, and the slight uneasiness which some of the staid matrons had betrayed gave way to restored confidence. But after another while she appeared in a third

garb, and this one involved a surprise. It consisted of dark drapery, from which her arms gleamed in gesticulation, but it hung down nearly to her heels—excepting! The selections from Omar at this time were expressive of his love for wine and women. Miss Duncan's suitable pantomime was chastely graphic. Nevertheless, whenever in the dance her feet stepped far apart one of her legs came forward, right out of that sedate drapery, and was on transitory view full length and skin-colored.

It was said that those who remained to enjoy the reading and the aesthetic interpretation were very critical of their more easily shocked Victorian sisters. "There was much recrimination and acrimony on both sides," remarked a reporter.

Poor Isadora! That March of 1899 seems to have been a most unlucky month for her. A few days after her Lyceum appearance she and her mother and sister were involved in the horrible fire that swept through the fashionable Hotel Windsor on Fifth Avenue. Things seemingly going well for them, the Duncan family had moved there from the Carnegie Hall studio. Their dancing classes were being well patronized, some of the pupils coming from the richest and most socially prominent families in town. The little, stiffly dressed girls and boys were shepherded to the classes by one of their mothers' maids who always called promptly at the end of the lessons to take them back home. In the expensive hotel which covered a whole block on the east side of the avenue between 46th and 47th Streets the Duncan's had an elegant suite on the fourth floor. In the spacious parlor they gave their lessons—the mother at the piano, Miss May giving the commands and explanations, and Isadora dancing the steps and movements of the lessons.

On March 17th, St. Patrick's Day, Fifth Avenue was festively crowded by New Yorkers waiting for the traditional Hibernian parade to pass. As usual the crowd was densest toward the approaches to St. Patrick's Cathedral at 50th Street. Suddenly, a little after three o'clock, the surprised onlookers saw smoke and then flames pouring from the seven-story building. A brief timetable gives an idea of the dramatic swiftness of the tragic conflagration. The fire started a few minutes after three. By 3:13 the upper stories were in flames, and two minutes later panic-stricken guests began jumping to their certain deaths from the windows of their smoke-filled and flaming rooms. At 3:25 the entire building seemed to be in flames, and only fifteen

minutes later the middle of the Fifth Avenue wall crashed down. Ten minutes later, at 3:30, only forty minutes after the cry of "Fire!" had echoed through the corridors, the 46th Street wall of the hotel had fallen. At 4:30 all walls were down.

Among the better-known survivors—President McKinley's brother and his family were also among the lucky ones to escape the tragic fate of the eighteen dead guests, the fifty more-or-less seriously injured and the eighty missing—Isadora was interviewed by the press next day at the Buckingham, another fashionable hotel on Fifth Avenue. She explained that her dancing class, her family and herself had managed to escape in time through the lucky intervention of Mrs. Leroy Edgar's maid.

"The class had just begun and my sister was talking while I was dancing to show the children how. We were doing the movements of flowers and butterflies when the maid came in with Mrs. Leroy Edgar's little one." The girl then left, but soon returned to whisper in "Miss May's" ear with incredible *sang-froid* that the hotel seemed to be on fire and it might be wise to get the children out. Isadora's mother in the meantime had seen two bodies hurtling past the window and knew that something was terribly wrong. Instructing the class to walk out in twos and hold hands and not let go until they were outside, the family led the children to the street and safety. They were all harbored in the nearby house of Helen Gould on the Avenue corner of 47th Street. There the famous millionairess was acting as Good Samaritan hostess to the injured and the homeless, and from her mansion the children were finally gathered in by their distracted families.

The Duncan family—with the resilience of those who have coped several times before with the emergency of unexpected departure from their home—settled in at the Buckingham. Considering the loss of all their individual and collective belongings, they set about reconstructing their fallen fortunes. Isadora made the rounds of her society friends and thought seriously of transferring her choreographic activities to London. Six weeks after the Windsor tragedy the *New York Tribune* announced:

Miss Isadora Duncan with her mother and sister will leave for England next week. She expects to give dances before public and private audi-

ences. Miss Duncan said she anticipates a successful season which will be made possible through the kindness of several of her patronesses.

The story gave some of the more prominent names of these society ladies: Mrs. A. S. Hewitt, Mrs. Charles Alexander, Mrs. A. D. Juillard, Mrs. Bolton Hall, and Mrs. G. W. Flower. It concluded with a sentence which is of interest because of its mention, though not by name, of Ketti Lanner: "Miss Duncan says she will, as soon as she reaches London, put herself under her old dancing teacher for at least a short term."

Before Isadora and her family had shaken the crass dust of Manhattan from their vagrant feet, she appeared at two performances arranged by admirers to provide funds for the voyage to London. One, given at Delmonico's by a certain very rich lady and advertised as being "Given in Aid of Miss Isadora Duncan and other sufferers from the Windsor Hotel fire," brought no money to Isadora. As she had taken part professionally in this fund-raising fête, the dancer promptly threatened suit, and a financial settlement was made.

Under the heading "A Soulful Function" one of the New York papers told on April 19th of another fund-raising entertainment:

Under the patronage of sixty-seven society women from the inner ranks of the One Hundred and Fifty of New York . . . an impressive function was held yesterday. Miss Isadora Duncan, assisted by her sister, Miss Elizabeth Bioren Duncan, her brother Mr. Augustine Duncan, with a large mama in a blue gown that was monstrous and unnatural, and a diaphanous younger brother distributing strophes from Ovid in the background, gave, for the first time in New York, some idyls from Theocritus and Bion, done into dance under the name of "The Happier Age of Gold". . . .

Miss Duncan has recently had the misfortune to lose her wardrobe by the Windsor Hotel fire, which probably accounts for and excuses the fact that her sole costume for yesterday's dance was a species of surgical bandage of gauze and satin of the hue of a raspberry ice, with streamers of various lengths, which floated merrily or mournfully as the dancer illustrated the bridal of Helen or the burial of Adonis.

Miss Duncan's melancholy brother kindly read extracts from Theocritus and Ovid as an accompaniment to the writhings and painful leaps and hops of his sister, while a concealed orchestra discoursed doleful music and the audience of tortured souls gazed at one another and blushed or giggled, according to their individual form of nervousness.

When the final dance was finished there was a sigh of relief that it was



over and that Miss Duncan's bandages hadn't fallen off, as they threatened to during the entire show. Then the entire audience of sixty-seven solemnly filed upon the stage to kiss Miss Duncan, her mama and her sister, and wish them success in introducing 'The Happier Age of Gold' to London drawing rooms in May.

Miss Duncan has fully determined on this reckless course, which is sad, considering we are at peace with England at present.



Part II ▲  
1899-1914 ▼▼▼▼

▲▼▼▼ EUROPE AND  
▼▼▼▼ AMERICA



## Chapter I



IT IS NOT TO BE WONDERED, AFTER THE WINDSOR HOTEL FIRE AND THE generally jocular attitude of the critics writing of her performances, that Isadora decided to go to London. Her brief association with Justin McCarthy, whose family was well established there, had no doubt strengthened her resolution to return to the artistic and musical center of the English-speaking world. From her wide reading she knew by reputation all the internationally known figures in artistic and literary circles, and she was convinced that her future lay in obtaining their approbation. Moreover, some of her society patronesses were passing the summer in the British capital.

The money raised by the special performances, however, and some begged or borrowed from society patronesses, apparently was not sufficient to pay for the regular passage to England of the four voyagers. With the adventuring gaiety which seemed common to them, they decided to make the crossing on a cattle boat. Yet with their clannish pride they felt they could not make the journey in such squalid circumstances under their own names. They became the O'Gorman family for this special occasion; plain Gorman being the maiden name of the maternal grandmother.

After a long unadventurous voyage to a continual discordant accompaniment of animal bellowings, the aesthetic pilgrims finally landed with relief at Hull. From that northern port they immediately

set out for their Mecca by train and landed in London towards the end of May. Within the means of their limited resources they started on an orgy of touristic sightseeing. All the historic and literary landmarks which they had long dreamed of seeing, and about which they had already read or heard, were visited with the wonder and awed delight of children. This quality of youthfulness of spirit was one which Isadora was to retain to the end of her days. Her little-girl quality of unfeigned admiration for all beauty in things and wisdom in people remained with her always.

Although Isadora in later years was wont to romantically exaggerate the hardships of her early days in London and the struggles of the Clan Duncan against a harsh and unfeeling world, the family were not so alone or unaided as she later recounted. There were acquaintances such as Justin McCarthy and former New York society patronesses then living in the capital. There was also her dancing teacher, Ketti Lanner, whose position as Ballerina at the Empire Theatre gave her a wide knowledge of the ropes. And there were the usual letters of introduction, the practical value of which her first stay in Chicago and subsequent career in New York and Newport had taught her. Aided by these, and her own firm belief in her artistry, many famous studio doors were opened to her which would have remained stonily shut and tightly barred to any vulgar transatlantic social climber.

Many prominent Londoners have recalled seeing the lithe American girl dance in various drawing rooms and studios during the fall and winter season of 1899. F. Anstey, the well-known novelist, remembers having seen her dance in the studio of the famous pre-Raphaelite Holman Hunt. The Earl of Lytton, the son of Bulwer-Lytton (better known as "Owen Meredith" the poet and novelist), wrote a few years ago that Isadora Duncan had danced at the studio of George Frederick Watts and that of Burne-Jones. Other memoirists tell of her dancing in the drawing room of the Victorian hostess, Lady Lother, in the always hospitable studio of Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and in St. George's Hall.

These private performances were invariably composed of parts from her New York programs: her sister reading selected stanzas of the *Rubaiyat* or some of the idylls of Theocritus, Bion, or Moschus, while the dancer posed or dance-pantomimed to the poetry; or Isadora dancing alone and sweetly to the three light Nevin's pieces or else

to Mendelssohn's popular "Spring Song." It was in one of these drawing rooms—that of Mrs. George Wyndham, a reigning beauty—that she met Charles Hallé, a middle-aged gentleman who was to be the means of a further step up in the artistic world as well as giving a new direction to her art.

Hallé was the son of the famous German-born pianist Hallé whose later career in England as conductor and founder of the Hallé Concerts in Manchester brought him fame and a knighthood from Queen Victoria. At the time of Isadora's appearance in the drawing rooms and studios of London, the younger Hallé was an artist and the director of The New Gallery in Regent Street. As such he was well acquainted with the elite of London's artistic, literary and theatrical worlds. With this charming and cultured middle-aged gentleman as mentor, Isadora came to know such personalities as the poet Douglas Ainslie, Sir William Blake Richmond, the eminent Royal Academician, Sir Hubert Parry, the distinguished composer, Jane Harrison, the Hellenic scholar, and many others who were to become patrons of her New Gallery performances in 1900. With Hallé and his sister, Marie, she was taken to the glowing Shakespearean performances of Ellen Terry and the 1900 Italian season of the great Duse. From that moment she idealized these actresses and later was humbly proud to count them among her most cherished friends.

*Three Evenings with Isadora Duncan*, under the immediate patronage of Queen Victoria's daughter, H.R.H. the Princess of Schleswig-Holstein, were arranged by Hallé. Through his aid there was formed a committee headed by the two prominent Countesses Gleichen, Valda and Feodora, whose other distinguished members included Sir William Richmond, K.C.B.R.A., Mr. Henry James, Mr. Andrew Land, M.A., Professor George C. W. Warr, Rev. Herbert Gray, D.D., Mr. Cecil Smith, Sir Hubert Parry, D.C.I., M.A., Mr. Holman Hunt, R.S.W., Mr. Walter Crane, Sir Arthur Arnold, Mr. Fuller-Maitland, Herr Rudolph Zwintacher, Mr. J. W. Comyns Carr, Mr. Frederick Wedmore, and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Some of these names have long since been forgotten; others are still remembered for their distinctive contributions to the arts; all had a common love of Greece and manifested their philhellenism in their writings, art or music.

Alma-Tadema, for instance, was noted for his meticulously painted scenes of ancient Greek and Greco-Roman life, always much talked

about at the annual Royal Academy shows and widely sold in color reproductions. The paintings of Richmond had such titles as "Ariadne deserted by Theseus on the Island of Naxos," "Prometheus Unbound," "Electra at the Tomb of Agamemnon." Andrew Lang was, of course, well known and read as the cotranslator of Homer; and his slim book of translations of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus was already a prized possession of Isadora. Sir Hubert Parry, among many other compositions, had written a choral work, "Scenes from Prometheus Unbound," and the incidental music for both *The Birds* and *The Frogs* of Aristophanes.

There can be no doubt that these British philhellenes, many of whom had already travelled in Greece, stimulated and encouraged the searching American girl in her literary and choreographic studies of the "Happier Age of Gold." Indeed, some years later in Paris, in 1903, in an autobiographical note detailing her earlier years to the public she said of her stay in the English capital: "Alma-Tadema was my guide in the museums and pushed me towards the studies of the ancient Greek vases which permitted me to reconstruct the movements of the antique dance." Conversations with such classical authorities as Jane Harrison, author of *Studies in Greek Art*, then working on her well-known book on Greek religion, and with the poet-translator Andrew Lang, opened the way to knowledge of Winckelmann's *Journey to Athens* and other works not easily available to the casual reader.

The first of the three evenings to which the London smart set flocked was given on March 16th, 1900. *The Times* next day described the entertainment as "entirely new to the public, and a pronounced success." The critic found that the chief performer was:

... a young dancer of remarkable skill whose art, though it may fail to satisfy the average ballet master, has wonderful eloquence of its own. It is as far from the acrobatics of the opera dancer as from the conventional tricks by which the pantomimists are wont to express the more elementary human emotions. Miss Duncan's exceptional beauty of face and figure fits her for the self-appointed task of illustrating in dance such passages as were chosen from the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Idylls* of Theocritus; these were read with much effect by Miss Jane Harrison. . . . In the more lyrical measures of regular dances such as the mazurka in *The Triumph of Daphnis*, or the rhythmic steps danced to Mendelssohn's *Fruhlingslied* the dancer made a success of no ordinary kind. Her powers



were exhibited in a most favorable light in *The Water Nymph* danced to some pretty music by Ethelbert Nevin, and from beginning to end the occasion was one of complete artistic enjoyment.

The writer of this laudatory piece was the distinguished musicologist and critic J. Fuller-Maitland, to whom belongs, perhaps, the real honor of pointing out to the young dancer a wider field for her art. After the first public performance he told her "that it would be an improvement if she would dance, not to poems . . . but to good music, and specifically the waltzes of Chopin." Isadora asked him to recommend music that she could illustrate in her art. "I told her how anxious I was to have the *rubato* of Chopin carried out in her dance. She came and went through one or two of the Chopin pieces until she could get the right elasticity of rhythm."

The dancer had ample time to put into practice the hint the critic had given her. The second of her New Gallery evenings was not given until the beginning of July, three and a half months after her first. Even before the first New Gallery performance she had joined the Benson Company in the Shakespearean season at the Royal Lyceum Theatre. The two resident stars, Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, had gone overseas once more to tour in America with their repertory. With the Benson Company, Isadora Duncan repeated some of the quasi-anonymous dancing roles which she had once done with the Daly Company. In the Benson production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, however, where she played the leading fairy at the head of a band of five children, she had, as *The Stage* of March 1st, 1900, remarked, "a good many lines to speak." She also danced in *Henry V* and other Benson productions.

For the second and third programmes of the New Gallery evenings, given on July 4th and July 6th, Isadora was assisted by Fuller-Maitland who played the harpsichord for her, and Arnold Dolmetch, the maker and introducer of ancient instruments in the nineteenth century as well as the tireless researcher and popularizer of early music. Of the second program *The Times* noted that it showed a marked improvement on any that had been given in London by the American dancer:

In the first place almost all attempts to illustrate well-known stories or poems was dispensed with, and the reading, which has been felt as a wholly unnecessary and rather tiresome addition, was left out altogether.

By way of preface Sir Hubert Parry gave a short address on the relation of music to the dance. . . . The aptitude of the French for the dance led to a reference to Chopin the composer most fully represented in the evening's programme. Herr Zwintacher played with beautiful finish and artistic style three of the Preludes, the "Waltz in C sharp Minor" and a "Mazurka in A Minor"; the third of the Preludes, that in C minor was illustrated by an appropriate set of solemn gestures, and to the Waltz and Mazurka Miss Duncan made an accompaniment of exquisite grace. Then the "Spring Song" and an encore were also danced, as well as the beautiful minuet from Gluck's *Orfeo*.

For her third and yet more original programme on July 6th, titled *Dance Idylls from 15th Century Masters*, Sir William Richmond gave a lecture on "Botticelli and the Primavera." An orchestra of lute, viols, violins and harpsichords, directed by Arnold Dolmetch, provided the musical accompaniment to the dancer. The composition of the programme was so eruditely arranged that one suspects the knowledgeable overseeing of both the well-known artist and eminent musicologist.

Following Sir William's lecture, the dancer's programme opened with "La Primavera" suggested, of course, by the Botticelli painting and accompanied by an old Venetian dance and a song with lute accompaniment. There were eight numbers (three of which were unaccompanied by dancing) and all of Isadora's numbers were united in theme by their use of early Italian music and the use of paintings by Botticelli, Titian, Ambrogio de Predis, and others, as the inspiration for the motifs. The beautiful costume, suggested by the central figure in "La Primavera," had been artfully fashioned from diaphanous Liberty silk, and it is still piously preserved by the dancer's adopted daughter Irma.

Although the young dancer's distinguished audiences thought her performances "very sweet!" and "quite jolly!" and many found them an original and satisfying aesthetic experience, she did not exactly set the Thames on fire. Without waiting to cash in on whatever success she had had with these new dance creations, Isadora decided to move further afield in her search for fame. The great Exposition Universelle had already opened in Paris with much fanfare and its glow had spread all over Europe, even to an England much concerned with its war against the Boers in far-off South Africa.

For some time "Little brother Raymond," as Isadora called him, had been living in the Paris Latin Quarter. He had taken on the pro-

tective coloring of a tonsorial and sartorial outfit which as another American expatriate later remarked, "gave him the air of a walk-on in *La Boheme* or *Louise*." His pressing letters, describing the artistic excitements and the storied beauties of the cosmopolitan capital, persuaded his mother and sister to leave the fashionable studios and drawing rooms of London. By this time Elizabeth, the dancing teacher, and Augustin, the actor, had returned to the more fruitful fields of New York.

Throughout the twenty-seven years to follow—despite her eventful travels all over Europe; despite her artistic successes in Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia and all the warm friends and admirers which she made in these countries; despite her more or less prolonged sojourns in Greece, Italy, England, and North and South America—Paris remained for her as much a home as she was ever to know in her restless career. There her heart was buried with the ashes of her two beloved children, and there, at the tragic end of her own fifty years, her ashes were also buried. Yet even in the French capital she was seldom long at rest. Even there her material roots seldom had time to reach very deep into the hospitable soil. The list of her Paris addresses from 1900 to 1927—studios, hotels, mansions, furnished rooms—reads like some Homeric catalogue. The list opens with a furnished atelier in the rue de la Gaîté and closes with another in the equally dingy rue Delambre, both in the Bohemian Montparnasse quarter.

## Chapter II



HAVING ARRIVED IN PARIS AND SETTLED IN A BLEAK LOFT ABOVE A rackety printing establishment in the heart of Montparnasse, the Duncans—Mama, Isadora and Raymond—as they had earlier done in London, began to do the town thoroughly. In an overflowing measure they had what has been dubbed “the American passion for culture.” Days were spent in the Louvre and all the lesser museums; exciting exploratory walks were taken through the statue-dotted gardens of the Luxembourg; visits were made to all the “musts” in the tourist catalogues. From their atelier in the populous rue de la Gaîté, they took long walks across the river to the right bank, passing the tragically burned-out Comédie Française to walk up the broad avenue de l’Opera and stand in admiration before Carpeaux’s joyous dance group on the lower façade of the monumental Opera House. They wandered through the Tuileries and gazed in wonder at the pedestaled gray-stone nudes. Then walking up the tree-lined avenue des Champs Élysées, they would stand silent before the Arc de Triomphe where Rude’s sculptured group of “The Marseillaise” held their historical and aesthetic attention. Many years later it was to serve as the inspiration for the dancer’s most dramatically thrilling creation. These naïve and adventure-filled weeks during July and August of 1900 were summed up by Isadora herself: “There was not a monument before which we did not stand in adoration, our young

American souls uplifted before this culture which we had striven so hard to find."

Three other contemporary spectacles also shook the aesthetic soul of the young visitor, leaving an indelible impression and adding immeasurably to her artistic growth. At the Exposition she saw for the first time the collected masterworks of Auguste Rodin who was later to become one of her warm friends and most ardent admirers. She joined the enthusiastic audiences at Loie Fuller's handsome little theatre, designed by Henri Sauvage in the *art moderne* architectural style of the period. There she vibrated to the acting-dancing of the Japanese Hanako Company headed by Sada Yacco. Later, in the enormous barnlike theatre of the Trocadéro, she sat in the gallery and watched with ecstasy and wonder the unforgettable tragic acting of Mounet-Sully in the Comédie Française version of *Oedipus Rex*.

Her friend and mentor, Charles Hallé, had come over from London to visit the artistic treasures of the Exposition. Under his guidance Isadora traversed its international splendors and made repeated visits to Loie Fuller's theatre. That genial music-hall artist, turned theatre manager and impresario, had long been a favorite with French audiences. She was the perfecter, if not the actual inventor, of the swirling skirt-dance, and with her own system of lighting she had transformed this into a rare spectacle whose vogue made her name and brought her a fortune. Long before Isadora had even left her native California, Miss Fuller was the stellar attraction of the Folies Bergères in Paris and from there had toured over America and England. "A luminous vision," and an "extraordinary genius," Isadora called her. At the Exposition the activities of Loie Fuller seem to have been wholly directed to presenting the Japanese troupe of actors headed by Sada Yacco. The stylized tragic acting-dancing of this great actress and the perfection of her exotic art conquered the elite of Paris. "Charles Hallé and I," said Isadora, "were thrilled by the wondrous art of this great tragedian."

As for the sixty-year-old Rodin, the enormous show of all the available work he had completed until then, including the controversial "Balzac" now standing at the Carrefour Montparnasse and the incomplete "Portal of Hell," was one of the principal attractions for the artist and gallery director, Hallé. Innumerable times he visited the building which the City of Paris had specially erected to honor the

sculptor. Each time Isadora went with him, she was more and more impressed by the varied host of bronze and marble masterpieces. A short time later she was to meet the creator, but apparently she arrived too late to be immortalized in a sculptured figure by an artist overwhelmed with commissions. He did, however, later do a series of pen and ink drawings of the young dancer.

Before leaving Paris to return to his duties at the New Gallery, Hallé had introduced his protegee to some of his good friends and especially to his nephew, Charles Noufflard. One of the intimates of this young man was Jacques Beaugnies, whose mother had married Saint-Marceau, a sculptor. Madame de Saint-Marceau was herself not only a musician, but was also the hostess of one of the most frequented and interesting salons in a city where that particular social activity was a highly competitive one. The famous salons were more numerous and often more varied in tone and entertainment than all the capital's opera houses, theatres, musical halls, and café concerts.

Introduced by Noufflard to his mother, with an account of her London society successes, the American dancer was naturally soon invited to one of that lady's famous Friday evenings. Thus she was started on her conquest of Paris society, for the Friday dinners and musical evenings at the Saint-Marceau house on the Boulevard Malesherbes, according to Marie Scheikevitch, were "unique occasions to which Madame de Saint-Marceau admitted no one, even of princely or royal birth, who was not of great personal distinction."

What Isadora danced that evening has long since been forgotten. A Parisian lady, the granddaughter of Dumas fils, could tell one the date of that Friday evening—January 20th, 1901—after consulting her diary of that year and also tell that a sallow young man named Ravel played the piano for the dancer but was hard pressed to recall what the newcomer danced, how she looked, or whether she wore sandals or danced with bare feet. For it has been told that it was at some society appearance that she first appeared unshod in the drawing room. Thus was another Greek touch added to the dancer's style, thus another element of naturalness strengthened her idea of what the dance should be.

After her appearance in the Saint-Marceau Salon there followed a rich succession of invitations to entertain at the town houses of the

leaders of the *haute société*. She danced in the drawing room of the Countess Greffuhle, which led to an appearance at the home of the Prince and Princess Edmonde de Polignac, and to many other society engagements. The American Ambassador, General Horace Porter, was proud to present her to his guests; and even President Émile Loubet invited her to dance one evening at the Élysée Palace, the French presidential residence. All these aristocratic and diplomatic appearances went unnoticed in the American press. That is all save one.

The *New York Journal & Advertiser* on June 8th, 1901, in a special cable from its Paris correspondent, informed its readers that "Miss Isidora [sic] Duncan the pretty performer of Greek-dances has shocked society by the following speech delivered in the salon of the Duchess d'Uzes":

When I am rich I shall rebuild the Temple of Paestum and open a college of priestesses, a school of the dance. I shall teach an army of young girls who will renounce as I have done, every other sensation, every other career. The dance is a religion and should have its worshippers.

At this late date it is difficult to see what was so shocking about the simple speech. To us, today, it stands as the first statement of a recurring theme in the dancer's career: her desire to have a school of the dance. These Duncan schools were to be, as we shall see, created in beauty and then through the force of circumstance they were to crumble away to nothingness. The speech was also a foretaste of her passion for the *verbe* as the French call it, the Word, the Logos. It might be said that the number of speeches Isadora made during her career almost matched in number her appearances as a dancer.

In later years she herself was wont to joke about this passion for speechifying. Mark Hambourg, the distinguished pianist, recalls Isadora having told him of an experience she had had in a small town in Belgium, early in her career. She had, she said, after a particularly enthusiastic reception by the audience at one of her performances, made a short speech. Next day she was called up by the police for having broken two municipal by-laws: (1) She had made an address in a public place without permission from the civil authorities, and (2) she had made the aforementioned speech in a state of semi-nudity—also a punishable offense!

Towards the end of her career she could also laughingly tell her

friends of the time when she was about to make a speech to a wildly cheering audience at the Trocadéro in Paris. Her old friend Charles Rappaport, a Communist deputy, shouted up to her: "One more speech, Isadora, and I'll get up there and dance!" The imminent spectacle of the very articulate, yet slightly simian orator doing a Greek dance, was more than Isadora or the suddenly hilarious audience could bear.

It was only a few months after arriving in Paris that the Duncan family moved to a large studio in the Avenue de Villiers. There, while dancing her way through the world of society, arts and letters, Isadora and her mother opened a school for children of the rich *salons* she had become acquainted with. Both private and public classes were conducted by the hard-working young woman. Among the little girls enrolled were the two daughters of His Excellency Yu-Keng, the then Chinese minister to France. One of these girls, later Princess der Ling and a lady-in-waiting to Her Majesty Tzu-Hsi, Dowager Empress of China, has set down in her book *Lotus Petals* a memory of these 1900-1901 classes which she and her sister attended.

The little Chinese girl was not at all impressed by her teacher the first time she met her. She had seen two of the great dancing favorites of that epoch—Otero, the flashing Spanish dancer, and Deval, the French ballerina—who both drove through the Bois de Boulogne in their fashionable open carriages. They had fine houses and servants and were admired and talked about. When the American dancer was first seen by her new pupil she was, as was her mother, all in black, a plain tailor-made dress that suggested to the oriental child poverty or mediocrity. They were probably still in mourning for the husband and father, Joseph Charles Duncan, who had perished with his wife and child in the wreck of the S.S. *Mohegan* on October 14, 1898. "Always fire and water and sudden fearful death!"

"She wore a high white lace collar," observed the pupil, "one of those boned instruments of torture, and about it were three narrow bands of black ribbon . . . meeting tiny, rhinestone-adorned bows, one above the other, on the left side. . . . One did not realize the striking handsomeness of her features or the glorious beauty of her body until, freed from conventional apparel, she donned the classic robes of the dance."

The lessons cost five dollars for an hour and a half, three times a



week, and the little girl impatiently wanted to know how soon she would be a dancer like her teacher. Isadora smiled. "It will require hard study," she told the too-eager child, "and plenty of work, for at least a year, to soften your bodies, before you can even think of really dancing!" And so while Mrs. Duncan played the piano: "Thump! Thump! Thumpety-thump!" Isadora directed the classes.

So many pupils came to her public classes that Isadora had to divide them into three groups. Often she allowed the two Chinese private pupils to watch her arduous labors with the large public classes. She seemed the most painstaking woman they had ever encountered, painstaking and smiling. And "that patient mother of hers, who endlessly thumped the piano! I might have appreciated her martyrdom more if only she hadn't always insisted on kissing us when we met!"

To emphasize her lessons in posing and graceful movements, the young teacher often took her pupils to the Louvre, where she herself had gone so frequently during her first weeks in Paris, to study the sculptured masters works and the figures on the Greek vases. "To pose beautifully means to practice, practice. . . ." she told them, "until the head aches, and the heart aches, and even the soul perspires with the endless effort. For a single awkward posture is monstrous. Even the people in the back row can see *that!*"

One of the memories which the Princess der Ling cherishes is of a fancy-dress ball which the American Ambassador, General Horace Porter, gave at his Embassy. Isadora went dressed as Cleopatra. One of her admirers of the moment, a certain Count X, "marched out to Isadora, kissed her hand with a grandiloquent gesture, and cried aloud so that everyone could hear:

"Marvelous! Wonderful! You are gorgeous beyond words! But you must create for us a dance that will fit your costume, and you!"

"Tell the orchestra to play Mozart's 'Turkish March,'" Isadora smilingly said.

"The orchestra struck up the march, and there before us all Isadora Duncan danced in a way that will stay in my memory to the grave. She was Cleopatra. . . ."

Besides conducting her dancing classes during the 1900-1901 season in Paris and making appearances at various private functions in fashionable drawing rooms and salons, the young dancer was also

leading a well-rounded social life with the young *cérébral* friends with whom she had become acquainted through Hallé's nephew and the artists and writers she had recently made friends with. There was even, according to Princess der Ling, an American artist, Joe Smith, who drove her mad by repetitions of "The Swanee River" and the Count X who sent her roses which she promptly dropped out the studio window into the courtyard.

The theatrical season, already a brilliant one, was enlivened by the creation of Rostand's *L'Aiglon* with the Divine Sarah in the title role. *Louise* had just been performed for the first time at the Opéra Comique and was continuing triumphantly to fill the bill there. And though the Comédie Française had been gutted by the March fire in 1900 which had taken the life of one of its most talented *pensionnaires*, the rest of the distinguished company continued in other theatres playing the classics and contemporary dramas of the repertory.

It was in one of these temporary homes of the Comédie Française that she saw her first Greek play. The impact of it not only stirred her to her emotional depths but further strengthened her growing interest in Greek art whose seed had been well nurtured by the London philhellenes. Mounet-Sully, the Comédie's greatest actor was appearing in a French translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* in a series of performances given by the homeless state company at the Trocadéro in October of 1900. Transcending the impossible stage facilities of the enormous barnlike theatre, the unimaginative *décors*, and the far-from-Hellenic alexandrines of an undistinguished translation, the famous tragedian was enacting the god-cursed Theban king with an incandescent power that overwhelmed his audience by irresistible waves of pity and terror. The young Californian, sitting far-off in the twenty-five-centimes gallery, only vaguely understanding the words, wept as she listened to Mounet-Sully's organlike voice which rose to the unforgettable soul-shattering scream when the climactic moment came. She watched with growing ecstasy as he continuously moved about the stage with a plastic harmony, a grace of gesture which was, for her, the "beauty bare" Edna Millay later wrote "Euclid alone" had looked upon.

During these first exciting days in the French capital she also saw for the first time two Greek operas by Gluck which she was to cherish

the memory of and later transform into additions for her repertory. *Orpheus* was performed no less than twenty-one times at the Opéra Comique, the leading role superbly sung by Marie Delns. Madame Rose Caron, another famous artist of the period, sang *Iphigenia in Tauris* innumerable times. Isadora tells us that her mother used to play the complete score of *Orpheus* on the piano in their Paris studio. Yet she was quite conscious, as any fine musician must be, that there can be no comparison between hearing the piano transcription of an operatic masterpiece and attending the opera produced with full orchestra, trained soloists and a chorus.

Isadora's adoption of Gluck's music as a starting point for her so-called Greek dancing was questioned by her critics. The French composer, Reynaldo Hahn, one of the earliest admirers of her art, wrote:

I must respectfully say that *Orpheus* is not, of her wondrous art, the manifestation that I prefer. It makes for an excess of pantomime which prejudices her dancing. And the gestures of Isadora, elsewhere so perfectly adapted to the music chosen, seem here charged with an end that confuses. . . . The *Orpheus* of Gluck is not an antique tragedy; its musical accent now suave, now pompous, its very form, which bears the stamp of the eighteenth century, lends itself badly to the dancer's noble project.

## Chapter III



AMONG THE AMERICAN SINGERS WELL KNOWN TO PARIS MUSICAL audiences at the beginning of the century were two western women—Sybil Sanderson from California and Madame Emma Nevada from the state whose name she had adopted for her own. The latter was a warm friend of Loie Fuller and took her to the studio of the young Californian dancer whose acquaintance she had very recently made. La Loie, as the French called her, watching the younger woman dance, immediately thought that she was someone with a talent that could be developed and presented to a wider audience than she had hitherto found. This was at the close of 1901. At the beginning of the new year La Loie was to take her Japanese *protégée*, Sada Yacco, and her company on a tour through the larger cities of Germany and Austria-Hungary, and it was arranged that Isadora should join her in Berlin where the tour was to begin.

Like her younger compatriot, Loie Fuller had been taken up by Parisian society and had a wide acquaintance among the fashionable and artistic sets in the French capital. Her fragmentary autobiography, which she was to write a few years later, was prefaced by no less a literary figure than Anatole France. In this work, published in French in 1908, she details her friendships with Flammarion, the eminent astronomer, with the Curies, and others whose names were then better known than they are since the passing of *la belle époque*. She also

devotes a chapter to the fascinating story of an attempt to launch a *protégée* whom she never mentions by name. Although the story varies considerably from Isadora's account, its logical sequence of events and the verisimilitude of the details make it acceptable to the objective reader.

"It was in February 1902," begins Loie's account of the launching of her new acquaintance. "I arrived in Vienna with my Japanese troupe, Sada Yacco heading it. With us was an artiste, a dancer to whom I would have been happy to help. . . . She danced with much grace—her body barely veiled by the sheerest of Greek costumes, and in particular, with bare feet. She gave promise of being someone—a promise kept."

In the Austrian capital the managerial Miss Fuller took the younger woman to all the salons to which she had an *entrée*, beginning with that of the wife of the British Ambassador whom she had formerly known in Brussels. There she almost stopped in her tracks upon taking a second look at her companion's dress. "She was wearing an Empire gown, gray, and with a long train and a man's soft felt hat with a floating veil. Dressed thus she was at such a disadvantage that I feared for a turn-down."

But the English lady, whose own sartorial tastes were perhaps not very pronounced, graciously promised to attend the matinee which Loie was going to arrange for Isadora. The Princess Metternich—an all-powerful member of Viennese society whom Miss Fuller had known as Ambassadors in Paris—also said she would be pleased to honor the gathering with her presence. Naturally it was important to get the American Ambassador and his wife to come to the "unveiling" of their compatriot. The Ambassador was a member of the McCormick dynasty in Chicago, and had married Katherine Van Etta whose sister was the wife of Joseph Patterson, then editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. One of the Ambassador's sons, Robert, was later to achieve a certain kind of undiplomatic fame as the extremely vocal editor of the family newspaper. Mrs. McCormick recalled to Miss Fuller that she had already seen her young *protégée* at a performance in her sister's drawing room in Chicago and "to tell the truth, had not been particularly interested by her, but if she could be of any help in any way she would be happy to come to the performance."

So, having lined up the social and diplomatic *élite*, engaged a small

orchestra, decorated the salon of the Hotel Bristol with flowers, and prepared a well-stocked buffet, all was ready for Isadora's Viennese debut. The bustling dancer-impresario welcomed her distinguished guests and then went back-stage to see the debutante.

"It was 4:30. In ten minutes she was to begin. I found her with her feet in hot water slowly curling her hair. In a panic I asked her to hurry up, explaining that by her negligence she was risking annoying a public which might definitely launch her. My words remained without effect. She continued very slowly to do her hair. Feeling I could do no more I went back to the salon.

"Suddenly she made her entrance, calm, indifferent, not worrying in the least what our guests might think of her.

"But it was not her air of indifference which surprised me most. Even though I rubbed my eyes she still seemed nude to me, or almost so, so slight were the gauzes which draped her.

"She came down stage and while the orchestra played a Chopin prelude she stood motionless, her eyes downcast, her arms pendant. Then she began to dance.

"Oh! how I loved that dance. For me it was the loveliest thing in the world. I forgot the woman and all her faults, her silly inventions, her absurd manners, her costume even, and down to her bare legs. I only saw the dancer and all the artistic pleasure which she gave me. When she was through, no one spoke.

"I went toward the princess who whispered to me:

"Why does she dance in such a slight dress?"

"Then I suddenly understood the public's strange attitude and spoke up with a voice loud enough for everybody to hear.

"I forgot to tell you how amiable our artiste is. Her baggage upon which she was absolutely depending today has not yet arrived, and rather than disappoint us by not dancing, she has appeared before us in her rehearsal dress!"

At the soirée which La Loie had arranged following the coolness of the matinee, there was much more enthusiasm. The members of the press were more shock-proof than the princess had been. Nor were the painters and sculptors, for whom Miss Fuller arranged a third performance, any less fervent in their admiration than their fellows of the Viennese press. The poet-dramatist, Hugo von Hofmannsthal

and the successful dramatist, Hermann Bahr, both led off with poetic praise in the newspapers; other lesser writers enthusiastically hailed the artistry of the young American dancer in her subsequent performances in both Vienna and Budapest.

One of the men who had watched the dancer with mounting excitement was the professional impresario, Alexander Grosz. He it was who weaned her away from the chagrined La Loie and dependence upon capricious dowagers; he it was who perspicaciously foresaw a greater and surer financial future for her—and, of course, for himself—in performances in large theatres throughout Austria-Hungary and Germany. He started her off with a series of evenings at the Urania Theatre in the Hungarian capital and then arranged for other well-publicized appearances in theatres in the larger Hungarian cities where her latest creations, a ravishing waltz to the Strauss "Blue Danube" and a thrilling, heroic dance to Liszt's "Rakoczy March," aroused tremendous enthusiasm.

Not all the audiences, however, were at one with the ardent feeling for the newcomer's artful dance. Many theatregoers were as shocked as the society ladies in New York had been in March of 1899, or, as had been the high-born Princess Metternich in Vienna. Indeed it was from Vienna that a cable went to the American newspapers telling, not of the dancer's triumphs, but of such a minor scandal as the following:

Advice come from Vienna to the effect that Isadora Duncan a young American woman who dances in her bare feet has had trouble with her audiences. The last embarrassing experience was encountered at the Karl Theatre. Miss Duncan appeared on the stage in Greek costume minus shoes and stockings and an Austrian officer in a box exclaimed: "How disgusting!" Miss Duncan retired from the stage, refusing to reappear . . . After a 20 minute wait the military person retired and with him went every officer in the playhouse. Miss Duncan then resumed her role.

To one of the preview performances which had been arranged for the Budapest intelligentsia a group of the leading members of the Hungarian National Theatre had been invited. Among them was the handsome *jeune premier*, Oscar Beregi. At the presentations after Isadora's performance, he invited the dancer and her mother to come and see him play one evening in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Although she was well aware in the words of the poet that:

Beauty is more than hands or face or eyes,  
Or the long curve that lies  
Upon a bed waiting . . .

Isadora was taken by the virile Magyar Apollo at their first meeting, when his dark eyes burned through her and set up an answering flame. She describes him as "tall, of magnificent proportions, a head covered with luxuriant curls, black, with purple lights in them. Indeed, he might have posed for the David of Michael Angelo himself. . . . From our first look every power of attraction we possessed rushed from us in mad embrace. From that first gaze we were already in each other's arms, and no power on earth could have prevented this." Until then her passionate adorations had been reserved for much older men—paternalistic images of the father she had never really known—like Alma-Tadema and Charles Hallé in London, Rodin and Carrière in Paris. These were distinguished men whom she respectfully adored with the virginal filial emotions of a well-brought-up maiden even when, as in the case of Rodin, the satyric advances were a little frightening to her native puritanical spirit.

Oscar was a passionate youth and the time was spring, but as Isadora was to discover then—as later—a choice had to be made between Love and Art. For Oscar the question was quite simple: Isadora would settle down in Budapest and be his wife. For Isadora there were the engagements already arranged by Grosz in the larger Hungarian towns and the prospect of appearing in Munich and Berlin. For Isadora's mother and sister there was no question at all. The breadwinner of the family should continue to remain with the clever manager who was ready to arrange so many money-earning engagements. Thus in the end Art, for the moment, triumphed over young love.

From her triumphs in Austria-Hungary, Grosz took his artiste to Munich, the art center of Germany. There she was welcomed by the leading painters and sculptors, including Franz von Lenbach, Franz von Stuck, Fritz von Kaulbach, and Walter Schott, as she had been by their confreres in London and Paris. But not everyone felt as they did. The average theatregoer or dance-lover protested that the prices Grosz was asking for an evening—fifty cents to \$2.50—were a bit steep even for a neo-Greek nymph from the Golden West. Cléo de Meroode, the dancing favorite of King Leopold of the Belgians, and a rival attraction in the choreographic field, could be seen for from



twenty-five cents up. Standing room at the opera was available at eighteen cents and the best seats could be had for the equivalent of seventy-five cents.

An American journalist, Allen Monroe Foster, writing to the *St. Louis Sunday Gazette* from Munich, December 26th, 1902, tells of the fuss over prices and continues:

"But what does this remarkable young person do?" you ask.

She creates, she poses, she dances. But not like anyone else. Oh, no! She is no toe acrobat, she would be a revelation to the star ballet dancer; she is no high kicker, dependent upon the vivacity and abandon of her contortions in spectacular rainbow tinted robes. She employs no illusions, no cunningly arranged mirrors, no beautifying multicolored lime-lights. Never was there anything less sensational than her work; it is severe in its simplicity. . . .

She appears here in the Kunstler Haus without a stage, not even a platform. A square space divided off from the spectators and carpeted for her bare feet, constitutes the whole of her paraphernalia, all the rest is Isadora Duncan.

The animus of her work is this: She selects a picture, a poem or musical morceau, and with her svelte young body she endeavors to interpret its meaning. It is posing, acting, dancing all combined. She is an adorer of Botticelli, and his wonderful picture of *Spring* is, with her, a favorite theme.

To the accompaniment of simple music . . . she glides quietly to her appointed place. Her dress is some soft gray stuff with printed blossoms. [The copy of the Botticelli dress made by Marie Hallé for the New Gallery, London performance.] And now with wreathing arms and undulating body and bare twinkling feet, she endeavors to present us the vibrant atmosphere, the pulsing ecstatic quickening of all life, the languorous, delicious *dolce far niente* of this marvelous season as she reads it in Botticelli's masterpiece. . . .

Her grace is indisputable. Never an abrupt movement, never a sharp angle. And to those with whom modesty, intelligence and feeling in the human countenance count far more than expressionless regularity of features, she is more pleasing than the much-vaunted Merode, whose immobile countenance affords about as much inspiration as would a wax mask.

The propriety of her dress is also a point on which opinions differ widely. She doesn't wear tights; foot and leg are bare to the knee. To some this is very shocking, as are also the glimpses of her form through the semi-transparent draperies. Others find it all absolutely unobjectionable, and I heard one apostle of high art declare that her bare feet was the one subtle touch that stamped her work exquisite art, and he insisted that tights or any covering of any description would spoil everything.

Suddenly Isadora Duncan became newsworthy in the American press. She began to be featured in the more lurid Sunday colored supplements. Her near-nudity was stressed and the shock it gave to Germanic audiences accustomed to seeing dancers—and indeed all female figures on any stage—well shod and with their often hefty bodies neatly and decently sheathed from toe to neck with skin-colored tights.

Some imaginative journalist concocted a long flashy story headed "Two Kaisers Fight for an American Girl." The supposed rivalry of the old Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary and the younger Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany for the national possession of the rising star in the Terpsichorean firmament was the subject of more than a nine-days wonder. If Russian grand dukes could battle for the favors of prima ballerinas, then surely it was conceivable that two rival emperors would fight over an American dancer.

Unfortunately the glamour-filled stories with all their fictional trimmings of priceless jewels lavished on the dancer, offers of whole royal opera houses, and even of proposals to build theatres to suit her neo-Greek taste, were wholly without foundation. Although she was proud to have danced before the Austrian Emperor at his Isch villa, she termed "*Absurd!*" the story that she had been offered the post of court dancer, and had been deaf to the pathetic imperial plea: "Do not refuse this chance to brighten the declining years of a lonesome old man!"

For the time being Isadora was not concerned with royalty. Her life was wrapped up with the young artists for whom she posed and with the writers and philosophers with whom she conversed in her halting German. She applied herself to studying the language not only to be able to express her ideas on her chosen art but also to read the works of Schopenhauer and Kant. She was also introduced to the works of the recently deceased Nietzsche. His ideas on music especially intrigued her. Later in Berlin she spent hours going through his *Also Sprach Zarathustra* with a young Nietzschean, Karl Federn. From that time on the German philosopher's most famous work was one of the books which Isadora kept constantly on her bedside table; one which she read in the original and often quoted from, to point a moral or adorn one of her speeches on the dance. The long conversations with her new friends and admirers in Munich, the endless

discussions of art, life, and philosophy, made her, if anything, more articulate in the expounding of her theories of the dance. The rich cultural life of the Bavarian city; the plays, music, operas at the Residenz and the imposing Hoftheatre; the Ionic styled Glyptothek with its Aeginetan marbles and other ancient and modern treasures; the new Pinakothek where, among other works of art, she could dream before Karl Rottmann's Greek landscapes, all left their sharp imprint on the eager and malleable spirit of the culture-conscious Californian visitor.

After a brief visit to Florence where days were spent at the Uffizi before Botticelli's "Primavera" and the other Italian masterpieces housed there, Isadora finally made her way back to Germany. Grosz had prepared for her appearance in Berlin. Once again, as in the other European capitals, the social and intellectual *élite* flocked to see the controversial "Greek" dancer. As before, there were those in the audience who were shocked at her semi-nudity; others, more material minded, were outraged at the idea of having to pay sums equivalent, or higher, than those they had paid to see Sarah Bernhardt and Coquelin, or international musical virtuosi. "Is Miss Duncan's dancing *art*?" became a hotly debated question. And when there was a proposal made to reduce the entrance prices for art students, Herr von Werner, president of the Berlin Artists Society, protested against this on the ground that he was not willing to encourage "immorality"!

Nor did the proposal to build a theatre for the dancer get beyond the talking stage. Backers of this project included among others the Countess von Bülow, wife of the German Chancellor and the Countess von Thule-Winkler, wife of one of the most important financiers. But Isadora continued to pack the Kroll Opera House and even gave free performances for poor working-class audiences. She was fêted, sculpted, painted and caricatured. The artists called her "Der Heilige Isadora" and the dailies and weeklies found her a rich mine of copy for their readers.

The *New York Times* of January 11th, 1903, tucked away in one of the back pages a small item headed "Californian Girl Succeeds. Isadora Duncan Pleases Berlin in her Classic Dances":

A Californian girl, Isadora Duncan, who is dancing at Kroll's Theatre has been the theatrical novelty of the week. She undertakes to interpret

classic legends and Renaissance paintings in dance to the accompaniment of choir boys and choruses and 14th century Italian music. The critics take the most diverse views of the artistic merits of her performances but most of them express unmeasured admiration.

Later, on March 29th of the same year, the *Times* told of the Californian dancer not only giving a free performance for a working-class audience but also of her delivering a lecture in English to the Press Club. This was probably the basis of her German brochure *Der Tanz der Zukunft*. Ending the brief summary of the lecture, the *Times* remarked sententiously that "Certainly there is need of reform in public dances. At present, as to art, they are on the level of a peasant's jig and considerably below the Redman's dance in which he expresses at least some meaning. . . . If these young Americans [Isadora Duncan and Loie Fuller] are able to storm that intrenched camp of Philistinism, the opera stage, and drive out the ballet, they will deserve well of the Republic."

As for the caricatures which appeared in some of the German comic sheets of the period, and the mocking laughter of many in her shocked or surprised audiences, Isadora took them all with good humor. From her store of remembered English poetry she could quote Pope's couplet:

All fools have still an itching to deride,  
And fain would be upon the laughing side.

She also had the satisfaction of gaining thousands of gold marks. With these Isadora returned in the spring of 1903 to attempt to repeat her Germanic successes in Paris. She was able to rent the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre for a series of matinees and engage Arnold Dolmetch and a quartette of ancient instruments to accompany her. However, before making these, her first paid public performances in a large Parisian theatre, she gave a few paid previews in her studio. At these small gatherings for which the tickets cost ten francs—two dollars and a half—the audience was usually treated to a *conférence*, or lecture on the dance. On one occasion the *conférencier* was George Clemenceau, the doctor-journalist-politician, then just recently elected to the French senate. Unfortunately what he had to say on that day in praise or explanation of the dance and its American exponent was neither noted nor long remembered.

The words spoken by the dancer herself, however, at the end of her first performance on May 30th, 1903, in the series of ten arranged at the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre were summarized in the Parisian press:

The intelligent artiste was kind enough to explain that her appearance has not as goal the gaining of lucre. It is rather a sort of apostolate of Beauty. Miss Duncan wants to reform the Dance which has become acrobatic. She wants its movements to be those of Nature and she has studied these movements in Creation itself. The day the Dance becomes an art, the body of women will take on the ideal forms of antique sculpture and the Race will develop anew following Aesthetic rules.

To the accompaniment of the Dolmetch quartette Isadora danced her "Primavera," "Angel with the Viol," and "Bacchus and Ariadne," which she had first danced at the New Gallery in London in 1900. These she followed in the second part of the program with two pantomime-dances *without music*: "Death and the Maiden" and the idyll of Moschus, "Pan and Echo." The spectacle ended with three Chopin pieces: the Fourth and Seventh Preludes of Opus 28 and the First Waltz of Opus 64.

While the French critics felt that the dances had a certain plastic charm and an interesting feeling for art, they thought the whole thing was attuned to the taste of dilettantes and artists rather than a spectacle for the general public. Two hours, entirely filled by a series of steps, more or less antique, accompanied by a quartet of ancient instruments induced a fatal feeling of monotony. While the American and English colonies were well represented, there seemed to be a good sprinkling of sceptical Parisians who were not afraid to laugh. At one of the performances a scandal was caused by one of the better-known members of the Paris Opera *corps de ballet* who expressed her disapproval by booing her rival.

After her triumphal appearances in Budapest, Munich and Berlin, Isadora felt that her ten performances in Paris were not exactly the *succès fou* she had hoped they might be. Although many people recalled them years later, she herself seldom spoke of them and made no mention of them in her *Life*. At the final performance on June 13th, she made a very brief speech to a large and elegant audience. Coming demurely before the curtain she said in her piquantly accented French: "I thank you all for having understood me. What I

have done is very little, very little—an indication as you say. But I am happy if I have made you feel that sculpture and dancing are sister arts—are they not?

“When I began, you said: ‘What’s she going to dance, this little girl?’ And as you have seen, I did my best. And I danced the last dance better than the first ones because I felt in sympathy with you. And so I thank you. I thank you.”

Among the spectators at the performances given in the Sarah Bernhardt were many young art students. Isadora and her brother Raymond, fearing that all the seats for the first performance might not be sold out, had gone to the École des Beaux Arts and distributed to the students *billets de faveur*—or “Annie Oakleys” as these free passes are called in American theatrical jargon. A newly arrived sculptor from Catalonia, Jose Clara y Alala, made use of one of these free tickets and wrote a moving description of what he had seen:

When she appeared we all had the feeling that God—in other words, Certitude, Simplicity, Grandeur and Harmony—that God was present.

She awakened or recreated all the fervors of the Ideal and of Art; the finest visions and the loftiest visions were born and unfolded through the magic of her movements.

Never was Prayer more ardent, Victory more irresistible, Virgin purer, Graces younger, Fury more tragic, Serenity more glowing than She—Isadora.

Another sculptor, older and more famous, the aging Rodin, whom she had admired from the first moment she arrived in Paris, was also among those who cheered her. He hailed her as being “natural on the stage where so few people rarely are. She makes her dance sensitive to line and is as simple as the Antiquity that is synonymous with Beauty. . . .” At this period the intimate friends and chosen pupils of the sculptor were preparing to fête his recent promotion to the high rank of Commander of the Legion of Honor. Isadora was among the very select group invited to the alfresco party which included among other personalities the painter Besnard, the young sculptor Bourdelle, and the writer Octave Mirbeau.

In the train which left the Montparnasse station on the morning of June 30th, 1903, sat a shy Scots girl, named Kathleen Bruce, who studied with the French master. She was later to be known not only as a sculptor but as the wife of the heroic explorer Captain Robert

Falcon Scott. In the crowded compartment she became aware of a rather dominant figure round whom the conversation surged. She gathered that this girl speaking bad French, whom she could not see, being on the same side of the carriage, was Isadora Duncan the great dancer whom she had seen some days before and whose performance had moved her to tears. And there she was, "talking the most barbaric French!" But after hanging back from the crowd of admirers when they reached the little village of Velizy near Versailles, where the party was to take place, Kathleen Bruce was finally introduced to Isadora by the master himself: "*Mes enfants*, you two artists should understand each other." And so began an intimate and affectionate friendship which was to last through the years.

In the first English biography of Rodin to appear (published in 1907) Frederick Lawton tells of a party, famous in Parisian art annals:

Miss Isadora Duncan, an American lady . . . rose and danced on the greensward, resuscitating as far as might be the Terpsichorean art of old.

Kathleen Bruce, writing as Lady Kennet in 1947, in her own *Self Portrait of an Artist* gives a less stodgy and more colorful picture of the occasion:

After lunch . . . a fine old Norwegian painter, Fritz von Thaulow, tuned up his fiddle, the sculptor, Bourdelle, played his cello and somebody said the lovely dancer must dance. Isadora had a long, white high-waisted Liberty frock on, and shoes. She said she could not dance because her frock was too long. Somebody said, "Take it off," and the cry rose, "Take it off." So she did, and her shoes too, and as the fiddler began to play, Isadora, in a little white petticoat and bare feet, began to move, to sway, to rush, to be as a falling leaf in a high gale, and finally to drop at Rodin's feet in an unforgettable pose of childish abandonment. I was blinded with joy. Rodin was enchanted. Everyone was enchanted, save the few inevitable detrimentalists who seem to creep in almost everywhere to prevent artists from having their full joy of one another.

The "inevitable detrimentalists" must also have suffered a shock when they heard later in that year that there was a question of the American miss being invited to dance at Bayreuth. Wagner's son Siegfried, having seen Isadora dance at the Kunstler Haus in Munich, had fallen under her spell. He broached the idea of her coming to the Wagnerian shrine the following year to take part in one of the

operas there. On August 3, 1903, the widow of Wagner, Cosima, sent a letter to Isadora dated from Bayreuth:

Dear Miss Duncan,

My son has already spoken to you about your participation in our performances of *Tannhäuser* next year and I want to tell you how happy I am that a remarkable artiste like you wishes to take the part of the first Grace.

Will you have the goodness to tell me, dear Miss Duncan, when you will come to Bayreuth?

My son and I will remain here all summer and will be very happy to talk to you regarding this dance which suits your great talent and its pure sources.

Hoping to have a reply from you soon, dear Miss Duncan, I send you my best regards with the admiration of my son, and I am sincerely yours,  
Cosima Wagner.



## Chapter IV



AFTER A SUMMER AND FALL TOUR WHICH AGAIN BROUGHT IN A GOLDEN harvest of German marks, Isadora and her family decided to do what they had long looked forward to doing—set forth for Greece, their Holy Land. All their reading of the classics, all their dreams of perfect beauty, led them there. As the Moslems setting out for Mecca, as the devout Catholics making pilgrimages to the Eternal City, the clan Duncan went forth with high hearts and the immortal lines of the ancient poets and philosophers on their lips. They could readily dip into the archaeological rag-bag of wide reading in ancient history and Hellenic literature, and come forth with a quotation to suit the occasion.

From Venice they journeyed to Brindisi and there took a coastal steamer to the Island of Leucadia, the fabled scene of Sappho's supposed death-leap into the Ionian Sea. From there they went on to the village of Karavassaras, through the mountains to the ruins of Stratos, and so to Agrinion. At that point they took the stagecoach to Missolonghi on the Gulf of Patras to pay a tribute to the memory of Lord Byron, who had died there. A small steamer then carried them across the gulf to the port of Patras and the train that was to take them to Athens. To any normal traveller, even in those early days of leisurely travel, the route taken by the Duncans to reach Athens must have seemed singularly ill-considered.

In a state of juvenile excitement they finally reached Athens after the long railway ride through Corinth. Barely settled in their hotel, they went out to mount the Acropolis and gape at the honey-colored marbles, as hundreds of thousands of tourists have done before and since. The toll which the centuries and vandals had taken of the Parthenon was instantly wiped out; the shattered Doric columns were set up again and the stolen marbles from the pediments were restored by the magic of their fervent imagination. Never was Renan's *Prayer on the Acropolis* more feelingly intoned than by this strange group that had travelled so many thousand miles from the Pacific shores to the tideless blue Aegean.

Oh, Nobleness! Oh, Beauty, simple and true! Goddess whose worship means Wisdom and Reason. Thou whose Temple is a lesson of eternal conscience and sincerity, too late do I come to the threshold of thy mysteries; to thine altar I bear a load of remorse. And endless seeking has it cost me to find thee. The initiation that thou conferrest on the Athenian at birth I have won by meditation and great effort. . . .

But prayers on the deserted Acropolis before the shattered columns of the roofless, denuded Parthenon, or silent meditation before the chipped caryatids of the Erechtheum, could not obscure the fact that the Hellas the Duncans were seeking was now "one with Nineveh and Tyre." The Pentelic marble shrines, minus so much of their original forms and beauty, still stand: "Eternal summer gilds them yet, but all except their sun is set."

In the city of Athens, life was much the same as in Paris. The Greek capital prided itself on being a smaller edition of the French city. There were wide streets bustling with traffic, fashionable cafés, fine theatres, newspapers. The hotel where the Duncans lived was the newly-opened Angleterre on the lower side of the wide Constitution Square looking across to the flat-faced, unexciting Royal Palace. This hostelry prided itself on the elegant style of its furnishings, the ladies withdrawing rooms on the ground floor where two pristine marble columns decked the hallway, the newfangled elevator that went slowly all the way up to the third story, and the offices of the ubiquitous Thomas Cook which occupied the Hermes Street corner of the building.

But the hotel seldom saw them during the first few weeks in

Athens. There was so much for them to see, apart from the holy hill; so many places whose very names rang wild bells in their minds, even though only crumbling fragments of the original remained; so many historic sites to visit; so many rooms in the National Museum and the little museum on the Acropolis to see, slowly and methodically, and each room containing so many precious works of marble, bronze, gold, clay, rescued from oblivion by tireless archaeologists like Schliemann. With all this to study ecstatically, what matter if the *loustros* jeered at them as they walked the marble pavements of the city with springy sandaled steps? What mattered the amused smiles of the Athenian elders, stiffly dressed and shod in well-polished leather footwear, no different from any Parisian boulevardier. Slowly fingering their chaplets of large amber beads, they gazed on the incredible spectacle of the missionary Duncans gravely dressed in antique garb. American Indans in full war paint and feathers could not have caused more comment: "Who are they?" "Where do they come from?" "What are they doing here?" or more curt verbal dismissals: "They're just some mad Americans!"

Soon the inevitable newspapermen gathered at the Duncan suite in the hotel. There they found Miss Duncan dressed in her flowing white neo-Greek robes and sandals. As she half reclined on a couch she seemed to them more like the replica of a bas-relief from some ancient pediment than a young girl from the far-off shores of California. Her poise was perfect in its classic calm. They thought her sweet soft voice had just the faintest thrill of rhapsody that bespoke deep feeling.

"Ah," she said gently to them, "you cannot imagine how ineffably happy I am in beautiful Athens. I came here to realize my life's dream; to be in a place sacred to the imperishable traditions of Greek art and Greek culture; to steep myself to the lips in the mysteries; to wander at will and muse among the hallowed spots where the greatest homage was paid to the greatest art in poetry, drama and movement that the world has ever known.

"I know that my costume is uncommon. I know it attracts attention, unpleasant perhaps, but that does not matter. It is necessary to the full appreciation and enjoyment of such glorious surroundings. To me it seemed sacrilege to touch the stones of Grecian temples with the high-heeled shoes of a decadent civilization; to sweep with the

silk petticoat of the twentieth century the sacred marbles of the Acropolis."

And when they asked her if she didn't find some physical inconvenience thus dressed, or find the sacred marbles just a trifle too cold as she sat on them, she replied disdainfully:

"Cold! Who could be conscious of such things amid these surroundings? Did the ancient Greeks complain of being chilled when they witnessed the Olympian games! How can I feel cold when I am inhaling the same air as Phidias, as Pericles, as Alexander did, looking at the same scenes, inspired by the same ideas? Cold?"

But the newspaper reporters who knew from experience the fickleness of the Greek climate at that season suggested that some woollens were in order. That is if the lightly-clad Duncans didn't want to take the risk of leaving their bones there as well as their hearts. Isadora, warmed more by their interest than their talk of flannels, was eager to tell them of the birth of her inspiration rather than discuss modern undergarments. She treated them to one of the many variations on her early life, a romantic rearrangement of facts which they had no means of checking.

"I was brought up in San Francisco," she told them, "where my father's house was plentifully supplied with reproductions of classic art in sculpture and engraving. In this artistic atmosphere I breathed the first years of my childhood. There I became inspired with high artistic ideals, and while a little girl my inborn taste for dancing was developed.

"While playing in the garden of my father's house I tried by instinct to impart to my childish dance what I saw exhibited in the models of art. Thus deeply imbued with the perfect beauty of the copies of great masterpieces, enhanced by the simplicity of the dress, from my early childhood I have considered the freedom of my body essential to the rhythm of movement. For this reason later on, with the development of my inborn disposition, a conscious study of the rhythm was at the same time promoted. Dressed in the beautiful ancient dresses, I went on in the mode of dancing which I felt ambitious to render equal in beauty to the Greek dances of the days of old.

"Here I am entirely devoted to the study of ancient art and the

great masterpieces. I pass my day on the Acropolis and at the different museums, inhaling inspiration and completing my education. My ideal would be to found a temple of ancient art, in which as a sacred priestess, I would devote my life to the worship of the beautiful. I am actively working to promote my idea of the reconstruction of the ancient dances and the ancient dress and their adoption by as great a number of my sex as possible."

Isadora's idea of a revival of "Greek" dancing bore some fruit through the years when festivals were given at the ancient theatres of Delphi or Epidaurus. Her idea of a return to the antique dress, however, had little influence save in modern *couturiers'* fashionable adaptations. The Greek peasant women and their sisters in the town preferred to them provincial and court dresses which dated back merely to the foundation of modern Greece in the early nineteenth century. As for the males, decades following the Duncan mission, a solitary character used to walk the dusty streets of the center of Athens wearing a hand-woven chiton and sandals—hand-me-downs from some Delphic festival. He was a *simple d'esprit*, with beautifully bronzed bare arms and legs and sandaled feet and a finely modelled head. To the same jeers from the sidewalk *loustros* and the same amused smiles of the elders that had greeted the young Duncans, he walked like a mobile statue through *cafés* and *tavernas* selling cockles from a wicker basket.

Nor was Isadora at all disturbed by the mockery that greeted her on her explorations. She walked to Colonus and had her photograph taken there by an olive tree to send back to her lover in Budapest. She danced in the deserted open-air theatre of Dionysus that lies in shattered quietude on the southern slope of the Acropolis, remembering that once the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and the comedies of Aristophanes were performed there before thousands of Athenians. She dance-walked all the way along the fifteen miles of the Sacred Way to the ruin and rubble-dotted site of the Eleusinian mysteries and spent a couple of days trying to people, in her mind's eye, the Sanctuary of the Mysteries and the Temple of Demeter.

The Duncan family walked and wandered over the historic countryside, summoning up the great ghosts of the storied past, trying to reconstruct such well-told occasions as the Battle of Salamis. They

walked along the then grubby banks of the sadly trickling Illissus recalling the still living words of Plato and Socrates and their friends who once walked there under the then spreading plane trees. They tramped over the slopes of Hymettus from whose flowering thyme clumps the Attic bees still extract their honey-treasure. On one of these walks they discovered a hillock named Kopanos that seemed just the place on which to build their own Acropolis, their own holy place where they could live together simply and austere and send forth their gospel of the Good, the True, the Beautiful.

They soon discovered that the bare and rounded hill was owned by five peasant families. These five families also soon discovered that the mad foreign family was most eager to get possession of the unlikely land—fine for bees and foraging goats—and that they did not seem to boggle at the exorbitant price asked for it. Are not all Americans millionaires even as every English madman is a *lordos* or “mildord”? So with an alfresco banquet of baby lamb and *kokoretzi* spitted and roasted over an open fire and other native delicacies including goatmilk cheese, and after many toasts of resinated wine and *ouzo*, the deed for the hill of Kopanos was signed by the mad Americans.

High-minded, full of fine ideals and heart-warming thoughts of the temple-school-home that was soon to arise there, no Duncan bothered to find out what the possibility was of getting water up on that arid height. (Water, even in urban Athens itself, was a rare liquid which was a nectar usually sipped and savored by its drinkers like vintage wine. Great jars of springwater from nearby Maroussi were carefully carried into the city daily by donkeys.) Their grandiose thoughts were all of drawing up elaborate plans for the new building which was to be constructed of blocks from the Pentelic quarries whose marbles had been used to construct the now ruined temples on the Acropolis and many of the show places in the modern city.

Raymond, the most Greek-struck “do-it-yourself” member of the family, drew up the plans for the edifice based on the ruined Palace of Agamemnon in Mycenae. He engaged the excavators and the builders and soon found himself having to do with less valuable stones than hardly-hewn marble blocks. Mule and donkey-drawn carts laboriously brought loads of red-stone up the hill; the foundations for the fortress-thick walls were laid; and following the custom of the country, the priest of the Orthodox Greek Church was called in

to preside with fitting age-old rites over the laying of the cornerstone.

No one was clairvoyant enough to see the future. No Cassandra was present to prophesy dire forebodings later to come true: no water would ever be found on the property; the great house itself would never be finished; the bare hill would soon be dotted over with the shacks of poor and miserable squatters, refugees from the 1919 Greek debacle in Asia Minor; half a century later the "palace" would house a *taverna* where on weekends the townsfolk and peasants would dance anything but the chastely Isadorean Greek dances. That, surely, the last ironic touch.

But while "little brother Raymond," the neo-Hellenic architectural authority and builder, supervised the unhurried workers, Isadora moved rhythmically through the streets of Athens and continued to spend long hours in the museums. Her notebooks were filled with newly gathered ideas. She jotted down the rules that were to govern the new community as well as her impressions of the ancient wonders and beauties seen in the course of her perambulations. To the reporters she handed a statement embodying some of her ideas, which was published in the *New York Sunday World*:

My idea of dancing is to leave my body free to the sunshine, to feel my sandaled feet on the earth, to be near and love the olive trees of Greece. These are my present ideas of dancing. Two thousand years ago a people lived here who had perfect sympathy and comprehension of the beautiful in Nature, and this knowledge and sympathy were perfectly expressed in their own forms and movement.

Of all the thousands of figures of Greek sculpture, bas-reliefs and vases there is not one but is in exquisite bodily proportion and harmony of movement.

This could not be possible unless the artists of that time were accustomed to see always about them beautiful moving human forms. I came to Greece to study these forms of ancient art, but above all, I came to live in the land which produced these wonders, and when I say "to live" I mean to dance.

Coming at last to this adored place, I find that the glory and the greatness are more even than my dreams. I am still dazzled. My dance at present is to lift my hands to the sky, to feel the glorious sunshine and to thank the gods that I am here.

What I have danced before was only a prayer to this arriving. What shall I dance in the future?—it is not good to have too many theories as to that.

As always, Isadora made friends and admirers. Some like the archaeologist Philadelphus, later head of the National Museum; the poet Angelo Silelancos, whose sister Penelope was to marry Raymond Duncan; and others like Constantine Melos, were to remain her friends through the years. As always, too, the artists and the poets were her leading supporters. And with them she spent many hours discussing ancient Greek poetry and music. At that period there was much heated discussion of the rights and wrongs of using the ancient Greek instead of the modern Romaic or spoken language. There was also excited discussion of what ancient Greek music must have been. From this stemmed a desire of Isadora's to recruit a chorus which might be trained to sing—in the original Greek and to supposed Greek music—the choruses from the Aeschylus tragedy *The Suppliants*. Headed by a young professor from one of the Byzantine seminaries, ten youths were chosen, and with Isadora they rehearsed in a large salon of the Angleterre Hotel. Following this, two performances were given in the large municipal theatre and in the smaller Royal Theatre, the latter attended by the Royal family, the court and the diplomatic corps.

But as before, the combination of the spoken word and the dance did not thrill her audiences as her own simpler lyric dances did. This was more vividly impressed upon her a few months later when she had left Athens and had moved on to Vienna to give her admirers there a taste of stark Greek tragedy. Her attempts to portray in her own rhythmic movements the fifty Danaïdes before the altar of Zeus, while the juvenile chorus sang in Greek the tragic strophes and antistrophes of Aeschylus, met with an unenthusiastic reception. At the end of her first performance, in spite of her usual explanatory discourse on her exalted ideas of what the dance should be and the importance of a return to its ancient Hellenic sources, the audience insistently clamored for their favorite *Schöne Bläue Donau*—the Beautiful Blue Danube Waltz. There was a dance that didn't have to be explained in words! Her movements to that melodious waltz were a poem of ecstasy that thrilled them and needed no halting verbal explanations.

In general, the audiences of Munich and Berlin were no more enthusiastic over the combination of the Greek male chorus chanting music (unlike any to which their ears were accustomed) and Isadora



moving gravely to the tragic measures of Aeschylus. And so, as the time was approaching for the Wagnerian Bayreuth Festival, the boys were reclad in twentieth-century suits and sent back to continue their Byzantine musical studies in modern Athens.

Having liquidated her chorus of Greco-Byzantine singers, Isadora went back to the more comprehensible music of Gluck, Chopin and Beethoven. The *Seventh Symphony* of the latter, "The Apotheosis of the Dance," was a staple of the orchestral concerts she regularly attended in the German musical centers; as conducted by Arthur Nikisch it always remained in her mind as one of her most thrilling musical experiences, having an emotional impact on a par with that produced by Mounet-Sully in *Oedipus Rex*.

It was fitting then, that before settling down at Bayreuth in the summer of 1904, she should return to Paris to present the "Seventh" and a Beethoven program. Two performances were given at the Palais de Trocadéro at the beginning of May. Intrigued by the stories that had come out of Germany, Austria and Greece, an immense crowd filled the great hall. According to Louis Laloy, an eminent French musicologist and critic of the epoch, "Unending acclamations hailed these dances unique in the world by their grace, their harmony, in their ingenuous nobility and their expressive power." And at the end, after ten curtain calls, Isadora spoke to the six hundred or so people who still remained in the hall, telling them how hard she had worked since the year before when she last danced in Paris. She hoped they had noticed the progress she had made. "But it is still not enough. The Art of the Dance is a very great thing and what I am doing is only the beginning. It is like a little girl making her first steps. I hope to do better next year; and I hope above all to teach young pupils who will outstep me and realize all that I foresee."

The enthusiasm at the second performance was such that the dancer was struck completely dumb by the overwhelming emotion of it. She could not speak a word to the audience. Her tears and beautiful depreciating gestures silently spoke for her. Paris had really taken her completely to its gay heart. So great was the enthusiasm that the dancer's manager was forced to give a third Beethoven evening on May 14th, also crowded and enthusiastic.

In the meantime she plunged into the joys of the spring season, then at its height. Recalling her start only a few years before, Isadora

graciously appeared at the Friday *salon* of her first Parisian patroness, Madame de Saint-Marceau and demonstrated to the *élite* there how far she had advanced along the road of her art since the puerile tripping measures of the "Spring Song" and "Narcissus." She was able to assist also at the presentation of *Hamlet* at the Comédie Française, with the revered Mounet-Sully playing the leading role. There were thrilling performances, too, of Rose Caron in Gluck's *Iphigenia* and orchestral concerts conducted by the great Édouard Colonne whom she was to meet in a few weeks at Bayreuth.

## Chapter V



BAYREUTH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY WAS A CHARMING little Bavarian town of about thirty thousand inhabitants. Each summer from all over the civilized world came hundreds of fervent Wagnerites to attend the famous festival. It was, in a sense, the prototype of the various music festivals which now proliferate all over Europe. Unlike them, however, the Bayreuth *Festspiel* was dedicated solely to producing the works of the German master, performed through July and August in the opera house which Wagner himself had designed with the idea of having the audience see as well as hear.

Many of the festival visitors came to Bayreuth as on a pilgrimage with high seriousness and religious devotion. The master was buried in the garden of his house, Wahnfried, and near-by in the cemetery was the tomb of Franz Liszt. Also it was only in the *Festspielhaus* that they could see and listen with dedication to *Parsifal*. Other, more mundane, visitors went there as to a fashionable watering place—to drink the health-giving waters, yes, but also to renew old acquaintances and be in the social swing. The *élite* of the European royal and aristocratic families as well as the most eminent musicians, writers, and artists were on parade there during the season. And over all the festivities of theatre and town presided the aging Cosima Wagner, the distinguished widow of the Master, and his son Siegfried.

When Isadora arrived in Bayreuth she naturally went directly to

the "Villa Wahnfried" to pay her respects to Frau Wagner, with whom she had already concluded the arrangements for appearing as the chief Grace in the Bacchanal scene of the opera *Tannhäuser*. Frau Wagner placed the dancer in the hands of Chief Secretary Krieger who was the head of the committee which had charge of housing distinguished guests. She also asked the major-domo of Villa Wahnfried, Christian Ebersberger, to look after the young American's needs. This young man of thirty in his *Drei Generationen im Hause Wahnfried* tells of his first view of the dancer when she arrived at his house with Herr Krieger:

Great and small crowded round the carriage to see Isadora Duncan in her white, flowing tunic, with sandals on her bare feet, and a gold filet in her hair. A most extraordinary sight at that period. And I must admit that I could not see enough; I could not get my fill of this beautiful figure which suddenly appeared before me.

Together they went looking over places where the dancer might live during her stay in Bayreuth. The choice fell upon a small hunting lodge known as *Philippsruhe*—Philip's Rest. But as the dancer had her own ideas as to how the place should be furnished and decorated, Mr. Ebersberger was told to follow her instructions and hire a group of painters, paper hangers and decorators to re-do the house. In two weeks the place was done over to her taste.

Mr. Ebersberger also tells of the first evening that Isadora, as the guest of Frau Wagner, danced for her and her intimates. The musical accompaniment was to be provided by Professor Julius Kniese, the Choirmaster of the *Festspiel*:

Everything was ready and waiting. Frau Wagner was a bit impatient. Suddenly she came to me and said: "Will you please go up to my room where Miss Duncan is with dear Dora [Dora Glaser the maid] and tell her that everything is ready and we are awaiting her."

Without the faintest idea of what I was to find in the room I walked in to give my message. As I entered I saw Miss Duncan dressed only in Eve's costume, while the maid was trying to cover her with a scarf. Dora was so furiously upset that she ordered me to get out, which I did in a hurry. At first I was annoyed by such behavior but later I could understand, for after all she was right. But Miss Duncan's opinion about what happened was very different. I understood that she wanted to talk to me but unfortunately was prevented from doing so by the fact that she did not speak German very well.

Then I went down to tell Frau Wagner that Miss Duncan was coming. Almost immediately following me, Miss Duncan appeared dressed only in filmy scarves. She bowed to Frau Wagner and said a few words to her. Then she demonstrated her great art. Frau Wagner, Siegfried Wagner as well as the guests were greatly enchanted. At the end of the performance Frau Wagner walked to the middle of the room and thanked Miss Duncan. Miss Duncan fell to her knees and said in broken German that she felt that this was the greatest moment of her life. . . .

To join Isadora in Bayreuth came Mrs. Solomon Sturges from Chicago, accompanied by her young son Preston. They had met first in Paris in 1900 and, although to many of the dancer's friends she seemed Isadora's alter ego, embodying and encouraging all the worst faults in the dancer, they were warm friends. She was a high-spirited Irishwoman of whom, as the French poet Fernand Divoire later remarked: "Mary would cut herself into a thousand pieces for Isadora but with each piece she would commit a thousand *bêtises*!"

In her fanciful account of her brief sojourn in Bayreuth, Isadora speaks of being alone there. Alone, that is, except for her actor-lover, Oscar Beregi, who came on from Budapest and stayed up at the hotel in the Hermitage Gardens, where Mrs. Duncan, Isadora's niece Temple and the four-year-old Preston Sturges were also installed—far from the festive "Philip's Rest." There Isadora, assisted by her madcap friend, entertained King Ferdinand of Roumania, the Princess of Saxe-Meiningen, sister of the Kaiser, and other lesser aristocrats. To "Philippsruhe" came also such notabilities as Humperdinck the composer, Heinrich Thode the art historian and son-in-law of Cosima Wagner (who often lingered on to declare his passionate Platonic love for the dancer), and an assortment of visiting artists and musicians.

For a brief period Isadora also entertained there one of her idols, Professor Ernst H. Haeckel, whose *Riddle of the Universe* she had read in London, and to whom in one of her outbursts of girlish enthusiasm she had addressed an admiring letter. On his birthday which occurred on February 16th, 1904, and about which a great to-do was made in the German press, Isadora wrote a congratulatory note asking to be permitted "to add my voice to the general rejoicing. Your works have brought me also religion and understanding, which count for more than life. Greetings and all my love. Isadora Duncan."

Apparently in the midst of the round of academic and social

celebrations the great man found time to write the dancer in a very warm manner, for she sent him another letter in April telling him: "I consider it one of the greatest joys and honors of my life that you have written me the way you did. I have read your dear letter many times and can hardly believe that you have written to me the way you did. . . . Here at home in the peace and quiet of my room I am thinking of you. . . . I . . . would love to have your picture and writings. Most of your works I have already and I have a postcard picture of yourself beside my bed where I can see it first thing in the morning. How much I would like to come to Jena and dance for you! . . . But my dance will only be a poor means to express to you all my gratitude and love. . . . Goodnight dear Master, your I.D."

Following this, Isadora received a package with a photograph of her idol and his books, and she wrote him from Bayreuth on July 6th: "Dear Master, your dear letter as well as your beautiful photograph gave me great pleasure. I am sending you a photograph of myself sitting at my writing desk in Phillipsruhe with your picture in my hand and all your works before me on the table. When I come to Jena I am not coming to dance only for you. . . . Perhaps you will come to the Festspiele? If you do you are always welcome at Philippsruhe. In any case I must see you this summer. . . ."

With the prospect of seeing his young correspondent, Professor Haeckel decided to accept her invitation and arrived at Bayreuth on August 2nd. Isadora, in her well-known white tunic and sandals, met her distinguished guest at the station and drove him in her hired carriage to her villa where he was to stay briefly. Haeckel, with his great scientific and sceptical intellect, was *persona non grata* to the Catholic hostess of the "Villa Wahnfried," and it delighted the nonconformist spirit in Isadora to arrange a huge party for him at her own villa where she danced for the guests and, as she puts it, "We feasted and drank and sang till morning."

But all was not feasting or gamesome pastimes at Bayreuth for Isadora. She was, after all, to dance there the leading Grace in the "Bacchanal" from *Tannhäuser*. There were long rehearsals to attend and eternal arguments about her idea of the role. Looking back on this one can only wonder what prompted her in the first place to accept the invitation to dance in *Tannhäuser*. She who had been building up a reputation as a solo dancer in a style totally devoid of

theatrical artifice; she who was decidedly anti-ballet was surely out of place in the midst of a production, albeit sumptuous and with Bayreuth *Festspielhaus* perfection, where every last member, and especially the *corps de ballet*, moved and acted in a traditional manner. It cannot be said with any truth that the strange experiment was a successful one. For the majority of Wagnerites attending the opera, as well as for such critics as Dr. Paul Busching-Munchen, writing afterwards in *Die Musik*, "Miss Duncan's *Grace* meant nothing more than a not quite serious intermezzo.

"She danced delightfully, but she danced among ballerinas. Her dance was therefore not in the right frame. She was surrounded by masterfully arranged ballet art coordinated with undeniable zeal to the music, but nevertheless merely ballet. . . . It was not pleasing. But it was an indication. What a single *Grace*—who did not even resemble her sister *Graces* in costume—danced, should and will be danced by all those who take part in the Bacchanal in the future, at least in Bayreuth."

The news that travelled to America of the latest Duncan appearance was not very copious. There did appear, however, a brief article in the October number of the 1904 *Theatre Magazine*, telling readers who might be interested, that:

The peculiar feature of the Bayreuth Festival this year is the barefoot dancer, Isadora Duncan, who some time ago made the conquest of Berlin. The serious beauty of this dancer is something quite conspicuous.

She drives about town in an elegant carriage drawn by two horses and is always accompanied by a man-servant who sits with the coachman on the box. . . .

Miss Duncan dances in *Tannhäuser*, and, therefore, this opera, next to *Parsifal* and the *Ring* excites the greatest interest. . . . The ballets, however, danced by Viennese and Berlin Ballet corps and which shows representations of *Europa and the Bull* and *Leda and the Swan* are far more Parisian than Wagnerian in type. . . . The dance of *Grace* is . . . danced by Isadora Duncan.

The dance of the principal *Grace* in the *Tannhäuser* "Bacchanal" at Bayreuth was the first and last time Isadora ever danced as part of any group except one which she herself had trained in her own style. It was always one of her particular triumphs to be able to fill a whole stage with her single magnetic presence, and by the mimetic power of her dance to make the audience feel that she represented not one

but a throng of furies. As Gordon Craig was to write of her later: "You play no little dramas with others. You are alone—you enter and you fill the stage with any figure you choose—and as many people as you choose. . . . Your imagination peoples the place." Years afterwards Isadora was to dance elsewhere her conception of the Bacchanal. As with other of her Wagnerian creations (Isolde's love-death, the flower maidens of *Parsifal*, etc.), she had her own ideas which she had written out and which were usually printed in the various programmes as an indication to her audience.

The Bayreuth season over, Isadora took a brief holiday on the island of Heligoland with her friends May Sturgis and Oscar Beregi. Later she went down to Venice to see the former off to America. In the meantime her manager had been busy arranging appearances for her during the winter season in the principal German cities. Negotiations were also under way for a Russian tour to take place at the beginning of the following year. Before setting out for her first visit to Russia, however, there occurred two memorable events in Isadora's life. Towards the end of 1904 she bought a large villa in the Trabener Strasse of Grünewald on the outskirts of the German capital. This she intended to be the home of her long cherished dream of having a school of her own. Almost simultaneously she made the acquaintance of the son of the great English actress Ellen Terry, one of her theatrical idols.

Like the young American dancer, Edward Gordon Craig was a visionary and an iconoclast; like her he, too, was "a prophet not without honor save in his own country." At the age of thirty-two he had arrived in Berlin in August, 1904, preceded by the reputation for being a new and great force in the world of the theatre and something much more than just his famous mother's son. With his fabulously beautiful productions in London at the beginning of the century—Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*; *The Mask of Love*, from Purcell's opera *Diocletian*; Handel's *Acis and Galatea*; Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem*; and the two large-scale productions for his mother's 1903 season at the Imperial Theatre: Ibsen's *Vikings* and Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*—Craig had enchanted the poets and artists of Great Britain but had left unmoved the commercial managers and the monied theatrical interests of the London theatre.

Writing about him many years later after a lifetime friendship,



Max Beerbohm said: "He is not an easy man to define. But one thing about him is certain. He is a man of genius. . . ." To Isadora also he appeared as a genius as well as a handsome young man who moved and spoke beautifully. Was he not after all an actor who had appeared with his mother and Irving in several Shakespearean roles, and had he not played in other companies both Hamlet and Romeo? All that, however, was behind him. At the time Isadora met him his interest was concentrated in formulating his ideas on the staging and setting of plays. In his mind, too, he was turning over ideas for a small book, to be published in German, the following year: *The Art of the Theatre*, a book which was to revolutionize the theatre as Isadora's speeches and dancing were to revolutionize the dance. For, like her, he was full of ideas and most articulate about them. "Teddy," said his friend, the artist William Rothenstein, "was as poor in goods as he was rich in ideas." His many books on the theatre and his designs and woodcuts are now cherished by workers in the theatre and art lovers all over the whole world. And when this still spry octogenarian speaks, as he sometimes does over the radio, he is well worth listening to. This not only for his impeccable diction, but also for the humor and wisdom of his commentaries. In one of his recent broadcasts over the BBC he spoke feelingly of Isadora and, among other things, told of his first meeting with the dancer:

I shall never forget the first time I saw her come on to an empty platform to dance. It was in Berlin, the year 1904—please make a note of that, somebody says it was 1905—the month December. . . .

She came through some small curtains which were not much taller than she was herself; she came through them and walked down to where a musician, his back turned to us, was seated at a grand piano; he had just finished playing a short prelude by Chopin when in she came, and in some five or six steps was standing by the piano, quite still and, as it were, listening to the hum of the last notes. . . . You might have counted five, or even eight, and then there sounded the voice of Chopin again, in a second prelude or etude; it was played through gently and came to an end and she had not moved at all. Then one step back or sideways, and the music began again as she went moving on before or after it. Only just moving—not pirouetting or doing any of those things which we expect to see, and which a Taglioni or a Fanny Elssler would have certainly done. She was speaking in her own language, not echoing any ballet master, and so she came to move as no one had ever seen anyone move before. The dance ended, and again she stood quite still. No bowing, no

smiling—nothing at all. Then again the music is off, and she runs from it—it runs after her then, for she has gone ahead of it.

How is it that we know she is speaking her own language? We know it, for we see her head, her hands, gently active, as are her feet, her whole person. And if she is speaking, what is it she is saying? No one would ever be able to report truly, yet no one present had a moment's doubt. Only this can we say—that she was telling to the air the very things we longed to hear and until she came we had never dreamed we should hear; and now we heard them and this sent us all into an unusual state of joy, and I sat still and speechless.

I remember that when it was over I went rapidly round to her dressing room to see her, and there too I sat still and speechless in front of her for a while. She understood my silence very well; all talk being unnecessary. . . . After a while, she put on a cloak, and shoes and out we went into the streets of Berlin, where the snow looked friendly and the shops still lighted up, the Christmas trees all spangled and lighted, and we walked and talked of the shops. The shops, the Christmas trees, the crowd—no one heeded us.

No one of the vast anonymous throng in the German capital heeded the two radiant lovers. The puritanical mother and sister of the dancer, however, and the busy manager were, in their various ways, heedful and greatly upset by the dancer's sudden *fugue*. Isadora disappeared into Craig's studio where, as she expressed it, "I was drawn towards him, entwined, melted. As flame meets flame, we burned in one bright fire. Here at last was my mate . . ." But the first transports over, the first passionate ecstasy stilled, the eternal struggle between the heart and the mind, between the spirit and the flesh began. There seemed to be no possible reconciliation between submission to Eros and complete dedication to Terpsichore. No man can serve two masters. "No, nor woman, either, though by your smiling you would seem to say so!" Craig might have quoted to her from *Hamlet*.

Possessed as they were by a passionate love for each other, they were also possessed by the importance of their apostolic and artistic missions. "After the first few weeks of impassioned love-making, there began," Isadora recalls, "the waging of the fiercest battle . . . between the genius of Gordon Craig and the inspiration of my Art." Art was the victor. Craig returned to his drawing board; the call of "the boards" and her rapt audiences pulled Isadora. The series of Russian appearances, which her manager had long since arranged,

was undoubtedly a powerful magnetic force. So, though still holding each other in mutual love and still with fixed esteem for each other's genius, they returned to the service of their respective arts for the time being.

## Chapter VI



IN JANUARY OF THE YEAR 1905, LEAVING HER NEW-FOUND FRIEND, Gordon Craig, Isadora made the long journey from Berlin to St. Petersburg, accompanied by her pianist, Professor Hermann Lafont. The date should be kept well in mind for since the dancer's death it has appeared in innumerable articles and books on the dance as 1907 or 1908. Even in certain issues of the usually fact-sure *Encyclopaedia Britannica* there is a lack of exactitude. And Valerian Svetloff, the historian of the *Ballets Russes*, writing in an English magazine, *Dancing Times*, as late as December, 1927, could be found saying: "Isadora Duncan's brilliant career may be said to have begun with her visit to Petrograd in 1907." The English ballet critic Cyril Beaumont in his book on Fokine also flatly pontificates: "It has been stated that Fokine's reforms were inspired by Isadora Duncan. But the dancer did not visit St. Petersburg until 1907!" But the date 1905 must be re-emphasized for it is an important one in the annals of the dance and particularly in the history of the Imperial Russian Ballet and its colorful offspring the Diaghilev Company.

To say that the first appearance of Isadora Duncan in the capital of the Russian Empire caused a sensation as shattering as any nihilist's homemade bomb is to make a bald statement. It can only be fully appreciated in relation to the time, the place and the consequences.

St. Petersburg was not only the opulent capital of a great feudal empire then hearing the first momentous rumblings of its imminent disintegration—Isadora's arrival coincided with the burial of the victims of the peasant mob which Father Gapon had led to the gates of the Czar's Winter Palace—it was also a modern capital with a fine architectural layout including palaces, churches, theatres and concert halls. Above all it was the home of the Imperial Court and the Imperial Ballet, as well as many minor grand ducal courts.

What the Comédie Française was to France, so the Imperial Ballet at the Maryinsky Theatre (now The Kirov Theatre) was to Russia. It was supported at enormous cost by the government; its personnel was recruited like the actors of the Comédie Française from a state supported school. Except for its native dancers, however, there was nothing specially Russian about it. Its balletic traditions were Franco-Italian, and the iron-handed master, Marius Petipa, born in Marseilles in 1819, ruled in St. Petersburg from 1863 until he resigned in 1904. The ballets were evening-long, four and five act spectacles, having a prologue and an epilogue, and usually set to undistinguished, made-to-measure music by such composers as Minkus or Delibes or Adam.

By the time Isadora arrived in 1905, the Imperial Russian Ballet was petrified by rigid traditions, rigidly observed. Only a few of the leading members of the company were great dancers in the true sense of the word. A ballet dancer's work was measured by acrobatic prowess, *tours de force*, leaps, pirouettes, and *entrechats* performed faultlessly by seemingly steel-like limbs always kept in trim through long exercises constantly practiced from childhood. Before a background of an old-fashioned though elaborately decorated scene and a whole army of coryphees and supernumeraries, the *prima ballerinas* would step down stage and, in the style of the Italian opera stars, do set pieces which had seldom much relation to the rhythm of the dreary music or concern for the dramatic advancement of the action.

To a public used to ballets staged in so spectacular if dull a manner, the spectacle of a solitary foreigner, barefooted, barelegged, with uncorseted body clad in a filmy tunic was undoubtedly a shocking sight. Dancing alone, moreover, to compositions by Gluck, Chopin, Beethoven, Nevin—music of the opera house and concert hall and

surely never meant by its creators to be danced to! What courage (many said impertinence) for this dancer to face the Imperial Russian Ballet—that vast bureaucratic organization ossified into a tradition-bound giant which moved with circumscribed movements in a fairy-tale world, opulently decorated and brilliantly lit! Though Isadora's impact did not bring the giant down, there can be no doubt that she had given the ballet world something to think about.

This, of course, applies not to the generality of the ballet but to those having authority and capable of infusing a new spirit into Russian ballet. "The beginning of the new outlook must be ascribed to Isadora Duncan," says Prince Peter Lievin in his book, *The Birth of the Ballets Russes*. "She was," he continues, "the first to bring out the meaning of the music; she was the first to *dance* the music and not to dance *to* the music. She altered the whole direction of the dance. . . ." But those who could clearly see any direction for dancing other than that of the Imperial Ballet company were few in number. For the company, as a whole, was not, as many laymen and recently converted balletomanes fondly suppose, a genial aggregation of Terpsichorean intellectuals. As Prince Peter Lievin further says: "It must also be admitted that the cultural level of the Russian Ballet was not high; ballerinas and male dancers were not educated people, their interests were all limited, and they were not interested in art outside the narrow sphere of their immediate concern—the ballet."

There has been much nonsense written about Isadora Duncan's first visit to Russia in 1905. This has been particularly true in England, where in the past three decades or so there has been a renaissance of the ballet as an art form, accompanied by revivals of the interminable Petipa acrobatic displays and a spate of ill-informed works by pontifical balletomaniacs. As always the hatred for the iconoclast is stronger in the heart of the newly converted than in the more tolerant bosom of the devotee born to the faith.

No one, perhaps, more than Sergei Diaghilev, who was the imaginative driving force of the revival of the art of ballet, can speak with authority about the role played by Isadora Duncan in Russia. In a letter dated from the Hôtel de Paris in Monte Carlo on February 17th, 1926, the creator and director of the epoch-making Ballets

Russes wrote to W. A. Popert, who was writing a history of the Russian Ballet:

J'ai beaucoup connu Isadora à Pétersbourg et j'ai assisté avec Fokine à ses premiers débuts. Fokine en était fou et l'influence de Duncan sur lui était la base initial de tout sa création. J'ai connu Isadora tout sa vie, aussi bien à Venise, quand elle voulait épouser Nijinsky, qu'à Monte Carlo ou elle dansait le Tango avec Massine en lui expliquant que dans toute danse il s'agissait toujours que d'une chose: "rien que des mouvements essentiels!" Isadora a donné un choc irréparable au ballet classique de la Russie Impériale.

[I knew Isadora very well in St. Petersburg and I was present with Fokine at her first performances. Fokine was mad about her and the influence of Duncan on him was the foundation of all his creation. . . . I knew Isadora throughout her life, in Venice, when she wanted to marry Nijinsky, as much as in Monte Carlo where she danced the Tango with Massine and explained to him that in every dance the main point was always: "Only the essential movements!" Isadora gave an irreparable jolt to the classic ballet of Imperial Russia.]

It detracts nothing at all from Fokine's reformation of the ballet within the framework of the ballet itself to say that his inspiration came from the Californian dancer. Nor can Fokine's English champions rewrite dance history by attempting to prove that as Isadora did not appear in St. Petersburg until 1907 or 1908, she could not have had any influence on this great choreographer who had, they wrongly maintain, already created his "Greek" ballets. There was then no "Iron Curtain" shutting off Russia from the rest of the artistic and musical world—preventing the entry of new ideas about dancing or anything else. There was a free-flowing commerce of intellectual and artistic ideas between Russia and the rest of Europe.

From her first public appearance as a solo performer in Budapest in 1902, the young American iconoclast was a subject made for publicity, and the newspapers and periodicals ridiculed or praised her lavishly. In her interviews and speeches she always made quite clear her feeling that dancing as practiced by the various state ballets—in Austria, in France, in Germany—"was a false and preposterous art, outside the pale of all art." She was an avowed enemy of "ballet dancing"—this not as a layman on the other side of the curtain watching a group of human marionettes, "a little more graceful than

dancing bears and not much more innately musical than performing seals laboriously trained to toot trumpets for their tossed fish supper," but as one who in her youth had had her full share of lessons from old-fashioned ballet-dance teachers like Marie Bonfanti and Ketti Lanner. She knew from experience the absurd emphasis placed upon acrobatic *tours de force* to the exclusion of any real love for the accompanying music or its rhythmic flow. She had watched innumerable performances in the world's great capitals and knew in the words of Lincoln Kerstein that too many ballerinas ". . . often ignored the music to which they danced, that their sense of timing, when it was not instinctive, was often inaccurate; that their realization of the underlying rhythmic pattern was superficial."

As early as 1903, Isadora Duncan gave a public lecture on the *Dance of the Future*. This appearance before a large audience, and the vigorous words expressed then, did not exactly go unnoticed, either in the German press or elsewhere. It can be assumed that the strictures on the ballet may well have seeped into the ballet-conscious periodicals of the Russian capital. In her lecture, which was published a year later in Germany, Isadora said:

The school of the ballet today vainly striving against the natural laws of gravitation or the natural will of the individual, and working in discord in its form and movement with the form and movement of nature, produces a sterile movement which gives no birth to future movements, but dies as it is made.

The expression of the modern school of ballet, wherein each action is an end, and no movement, pose or rhythm is successive or can be made to evolve succeeding action, is an expression of degeneration, of living death. All the movements of our modern ballet school are sterile movements because they are unnatural: their purpose is to create the delusion that the law of gravitation does not exist for them.

To those who nevertheless still enjoy the movements, for historical or choreographic or whatever other reasons, to these I answer: they see no farther than the skirts and tricots. But look—under the skirts farther—undemeath the muscles and deformed bones. A deformed skeleton is dancing before you. The deformation through incorrect dress and incorrect movement is the result of the training necessary to the ballet.

The ballet condemns itself by enforcing the deformation of the beautiful woman's body! No historical, or choreographic reasons can prevail against that!



It is the mission of all art to express the highest and the most beautiful ideals of man. What ideal does the ballet express?

No, the dance was once the most noble of all arts; and it shall be again. From the great depth to which it has fallen, it shall be raised. The dancer of the future shall attain so great a height that all other arts shall be helped thereby.

To express what is the most moral, healthful and beautiful in art—that is the mission of the dancer, and to this I dedicate my life.

That Isadora Duncan's reputation as a particularly articulate apostle of a new style of dancing had preceded her to St. Petersburg cannot be doubted. And the audiences that welcomed her were composed not only of the curious and the sensation-seekers anxious to see this much-publicized semi-nude American girl, but also, as elsewhere in Europe, of a body of the city's intellectual elite. The artists, the writers, the musicians, as well as the leading dancers, were well represented.

When she went on to Moscow after her preliminary appearance in St. Petersburg, among those who saw and admired her so much was the great actor-director of the famous Moscow Art Theatre, Constantin Stanislavsky, who never missed one of her performances. In his autobiography, *My Life in Art*, he tells of Isadora's appearance, albeit a little hazy on dates like the lady herself:

I appeared at Isadora Duncan's concert by accident. . . . I was very much surprised that in the rather small audience that came to see her there was a tremendous percentage of artists and sculptors with Mamontov at their head, many artists of the ballet, and many first-nighters and lovers of the unusual in the theatre. The first appearance of Duncan on the stage did not make a very big impression. Unaccustomed to see an almost naked body on the stage, I could hardly notice and understand the art of the dancer. The first number on the program was met with tepid applause and timid attempts at whistling. But after a few of the succeeding numbers, one of which was especially persuasive, I could not longer remain indifferent to the protests of the general public and began to applaud demonstratively.

When the intermission came, I, a newly baptized disciple of the great artist, ran to the footlights to applaud. To my joy I found myself side by side with Mamontov, who was doing exactly what I was doing. . . . When the general run of the audience saw that among those who applauded were well-known Moscow artists and actors, there was a great deal of confusion. The hissing stopped . . . the applause became general,

and was followed by curtain calls, and at the end of the performance by an ovation.

Although for some reason he did not get to know her upon that first visit to Moscow, Stanislavsky received her as a guest of honor at the Moscow Art Theatre during her second visit in 1907. The reception became general, he says, "for our entire company joined me, as they had all come to know and love her as an artist." And as the leading ballerinas of Moscow and St. Petersburg came to know her they, too, loved and respected her as an artist. Isadora had strong feelings about the ballet as an art form but these did not extend to its great practitioners. For Kschessinskia, Pavlova, Karsavina, Nijinsky and many of the other stars of the Imperial Russian Ballet, she had the same humble, little-girl admiration which she always unreservedly displayed before all great artists in their own field. Long years after her first visit to St. Petersburg she recalled how touched she was at her colleagues' kindness and warm hospitality. She told in detail how the *prima ballerina assoluta*, Mathilda Kschessinskia, visited her and extended an invitation in the name of the ballet company to a gala performance at the Maryinsky Theatre. Afterwards there was a magnificent supper party at the famous ballerina's palace, where Isadora was presented to the Grand Duke Michael and various other members of the aristocracy, as well as to the leading dancers and artists of the capital.

Even more than in her appearances in Paris at the Sarah Bernhardt or in Berlin at the Kroll, the first appearances of the new dancer at the Salle des Nobles were not completely successful in conquering the whole audience. The fervent ballet lovers waiting for some outward visible sign of the dancer's "technique" were deceived and thoroughly disappointed by her apparent simplicity. The music lovers were divided among themselves about the propriety of her use of great music which the composers had not intended for anything but instrumental or vocal performance. The composer Rimski-Korsakov on this point wrote to a friend:

Concerning Duncan, I must tell you that I have never seen her. She is presumably very graceful, a splendid mime and so forth. But the thing that repels me in her is her foisting her art upon, tacking it on to, music that is very dear to me and does not need her company, and on which its

composers had not counted. How upset I should be if I learned that Miss Duncan danced and mimetically explained my *Scheherazade* for instance, or my *Antar*, or *Easter Overture*!

He goes on to remark: ". . . that when miming foists itself unbidden upon music, it only harms it by diverting attention from it." One may be allowed, in passing, to wonder what he would have said had he lived to see the 1910 Diaghilev ballet set to his *Scheherazade*, having no connection with the original scheme of the music and with all the attention diverted from it, not only by the gorgeous costumes and sets of Bakst, but by the miming of Nijinsky and Karsavina and the titillating Oriental orgy. His family, it is said, did their best to prevent the misuse of Rimski-Korsakov's music by the ballet company.

When Isadora Duncan showed Fokine and others that it was possible to dance to instrumental, operatic or orchestral music, most probably never intended by the composers to be a vehicle for any Terpsichorean fancy, she also showed them how it was possible to respect the rhythm and inner meaning of such music. In her dancing of Gluck's *Orpheus*, Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*, the pianistic *morceaux* of Chopin, and the seventeenth-century pieces of her *Dance Idylls* which all comprised her various programmes in Russia, she neither distorted nor did violence to the composer's musical line or rhythm. There cannot be much ground for disputing the fact that Fokine's *Les Sylphides*, *Carnival*, *Cléopâtre*, and the Greek-styled *Acis et Galatée* and *Eunice* were directly inspired by the ideas which the American dancer made manifest before and during her appearances in St. Petersburg in 1905.

Today, fifty years later, the argument still continues about the justice of dancers or choreographers' use of symphonic, instrumental, or vocal music never remotely intended by the composer for their use. Music lovers still find it difficult to excuse the uses to which masterpieces by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Bizet, Chausson, and even Mahler have been put by contemporary choreographers. The forthright George Jean Nathan has set down his opinion about the use of the last-named composer's *Kindertotenlieder*. This, for the choreographer's purpose retitled *Dark Elegies*, prompted Nathan to remark on the effort to combine choreography with Gustav Mahler's song cycle:

Inasmuch as Mahler composed this music after the death of a particularly beloved child and inasmuch further, as it reflects his deep and intimate sorrow, the idea of accompanying it with a troupe of kickers and posturers comes about as close to the obscene and ridiculous as is humanly imaginable.

## Chapter VII



UPON HER RETURN FROM RUSSIA, ISADORA BEGAN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY a new series of performances in the larger cities of Germany. The immediate purpose of these was not only to earn money to furnish the villa she had bought the year before for her proposed school but also to seek out likely pupils who were to be housed, clothed and taught without compensation. Although her dream was to have a small army of children, she was content to begin with twenty little girls, ranging in age from four to eight years old. Many years later, in an unposted letter prepared in answer to an attack against her pupils made by a Parisian gutter journalist, she explained the genesis of the school:

When I was twenty-six and suddenly found myself earning large sums by my performances, I might have, like many other young women, bought pearls, diamonds and fancy clothes. It was then, however, obeying some inner voice, that I had the idea of adopting twenty poor little children, saying to myself: 'I am going to give these beings a finer life, a higher education, so that later in their turn they can spread joy and beauty about them like a glow over this sad earth.'

Sometime after the founding of the school, when it became evident that all the money earned by the dancer herself would not be sufficient to run it, there was incorporated an *Association for the Support and Maintenance of the Dance School of Isadora Duncan* which had as its president the dancer's friend, Professor Walter Schott. He was a

well-known academic sculptor who had done a beautiful dance figure of Isadora which was greatly admired. The secretary was the composer Engelbert Humperdinck, who headed a Berlin music school and was already famous for his *Hansel and Gretel* folk opera. The Berlin banker, Hermann Kretzschmar, acted as treasurer. For the illustrated brochure which was sent out announcing the new association Isadora wrote a foreword:

During the last ten years of my work I have constantly had the clear intention of founding a school which would restore the dance to its former high level of art. From various signs I have noticed that this art is in the throes of a new awakening. There is a real longing in the world for rhythmic movements; in the younger generation, especially among students, there is a very noticeable desire for physical expression through movement. Visible proof that I have not been mistaken in my assumption is the recognition which the general public has given to my own endeavors in this respect. Convinced that it only needed someone with a firm will to make a start in that direction and inspire others to help achieve this great aim which might develop into something really great in the future, I opened the new School of the Dance in 1904.

To rediscover in its ideal form the beautiful rhythmic movements of the human body, in harmony with the highest beauty of physical form, and to resuscitate an art that has lain dormant for two thousand years; this is the serious purpose of my school.

Before beginning to teach her little charges, however, thought had to be given to the furnishing of the villa which was to be their new home. Isadora wished to have them taught not only by direct lessons, but also to have them influenced indirectly by the beauty of their surroundings and by the freedom and harmonious simplicity of their dress. About the various rooms of the school she placed reproductions of works by ancient and modern artists. Casts of the lovely blue-and-white Della Robbia ceramics, the Donatello dancing children, Tanagra figures and other statues of dancing groups, together with paintings of children by Gainsborough and others were placed in the various rooms. In the main room was set up a larger than life-size cast of an antique Amazon, a sort of votive statue for the school. The children's dormitories were colorfully though austere furnished, and the general tonality of the house was the beautiful blue of the dancer's famous curtains. Give to these children—was Isadora's command—Beauty, Freedom, Health.

They were surrounded by beauty and daily taught the beauties of

movement, music, and literature. Music lessons were given by the dancer's accompanist, the pianist Professor Hermann Lafont of the Klindworth-Scharwenka Conservatory. Speech and singing were taught by Professor Henry Bickford Pasmore of the Sterner Conservatory and an American friend of the Duncan family. Lessons in the theory of music and orchestration were given by Max Merz, who was Elizabeth's special friend and was later to take over with her the direction of the school. Gymnastics were the province of Dr. Jaerschky; and nature studies and drawing were taught by Konrad Müller-Furer. Isadora's elder sister, Elizabeth, taught the children dancing by pedagogical word of mouth, her feet as always firmly planted on the ground; while Isadora herself moved and ran and leaped rhythmically to demonstrate the artistic possibilities of the free and gracious body. A doctor and a dentist were also part of the school faculty.

The curriculum of the school was very simple, as Isadora once explained to an inquirer. The children rose at seven in the morning and after half an hour in the open air they had a breakfast of cereal, milk and bread; they were not allowed either coffee or tea. After breakfast they had another half hour in the open air and physical exercises for forty-five minutes. In order to have muscular coordination they were taught to leap over chairs, turn somersaults, and do various other acrobatic movements which had no actual use in the dance. Next came some deep-breathing exercises and singing before the other general classes in the educational routine prescribed by the government's educational system.

After the midday meal there were more general educational classes until four o'clock, when the children were taken for a long walk in their sandals and tunics. These were usually punctuated by jeering remarks from guttersnipes, and snorts from the proper *herrenvolk* of Grünewald. Occasionally between classes there were intermissions when the children were allowed to romp in the garden. As for dancing lessons, there were really only two two-hour sessions a week seriously devoted to that art. These took place each Wednesday and Saturday from four to six, and the only punishment allowed in the school was a deprivation of attendance at these classes.

As the school progressed, it was discovered that the expenses outran the dancer's income. She therefore undertook a tour of the large cities outside Germany—to Holland and the Scandinavian countries

where there was a large public awaiting a chance to see this bold innovator of whom they had heard so much. She was welcomed and feted wherever she appeared; but the financial rewards were still not large enough to keep on subsidizing the school far into the future. Before long another solution to the monetary problem was suggested. Would not public exhibitions by the children be the best advertisement for the school and also incidentally add to its necessary funds? This was something Isadora loathed to do. The course led far away from her dream of the ideal Academy of the Dance.

"People . . . thought that I wished to form a troupe of dancers to perform in the theatre," she later wrote. "Certainly nothing was further from my thoughts. Far from wishing to develop theatre dancers, I only hoped to train in my school numbers of children who, through dance, music, poetry and song, would express the feelings of the people, with grace and beauty. Alas! It took only too short a time to learn that I could not carry out this work unaided. . . ."

Nevertheless, the children of the Grünewald school were put on exhibition, first in Berlin and then in several of the larger German cities, before being taken to Russia and England.

"The first result of this showed well; I saw the first showing at a matinee at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin," says Gordon Craig, "where, after dancing her own dances . . . she called her little pupils to come to her and please the public with their little leaping and runnings; as they did, and with her leading them the whole troupe became irresistibly lovely. I suppose some people even then and there began reasoning about it, trying to pluck out the heart of the mystery. But I and hundreds of others who saw this first revelation did not stop to reason. . . . And so it was . . . that day—we all wept and laughed for joy. And to see her shepherding her little flock, keeping them together and specially looking after one very small one of four years, was a sight no one there had ever seen before and, I suppose, will never see again."

The public appearances of the pupils and Isadora's long absences away from the school in order to fulfill her own public commitments and to earn enough money for herself as well as her family and the school were cankers at the root of her ideal. As she herself often remarked later, her life had two motivating forces: Love and Art. And often, she was to find out, Love destroyed Art. Or if it did not com-



pletely destroy it, Love could sometimes, at least, temporarily put it in second place or temporarily obstruct the dancer's Art.

Thus, in the summer of 1905, Isadora began to feel growing within her the fruit of her free union with Craig. Obeying a strong impulse she escaped from her family and intimates in Berlin. She had an overwhelming desire to be completely alone, somewhere by the immensity of the sea, whose rhythmic movements she had always loved from her earliest childhood. The place she chose was a little village, Nordwyk, near Leyden and the Hague in Holland. There she rented the Villa Maria perched high on the sand dunes. For a few weeks her little niece, Temple, the daughter of her well-loved brother Augustin, kept her company and delighted her by dancing along the sandy beach to show how well she had learned her rhythmic lessons in the school at Grunewald.

Most of the time, however, Isadora hid away there alone. She read her favorite Greek and German philosophers, and wrote, among other things, some rules for the teaching of her pupils. In August, a nurse, Marie Kist, came to stay at the Villa, for as her time approached Isadora's spirit moved between heights of joyful anticipation and profound depressions of fear. During one of these dark moments she sent a letter to a friend in Paris, Kathleen Bruce, whom she had cherished since meeting her at Rodin's in the summer of 1903. The letter was a "queer cry, childish and pathetic."

Arriving at Nordwyk, the Scottish sculptress ("a magnetic person, filled with life and health and courage," as Isadora described her) asked her ailing friend what the matter was:

"Can't you see?" cried the dancer, spreading high her lovely arms. Slowly and with many a lie, the story came out at last . . . and her baby was due. . . . She had dared to tell nobody, not her mother or her sister. She had danced as long as she dared. She was lonely and miserable. In after years . . . she said and probably believed that she had done this deliberately, and was proud of her courage and independence; but at that time she was still nothing more than a frightened girl, frightened and pitiful.

So the last summer days passed as Isadora waited in the "little sea-side villa on a lonely foreign beach." The dancer, her once lithe, hard body now "softened and broken and stretched and deformed," spent hours sewing little garments as mothers all over the world have

done from time immemorial, thinking of the child to come and also of her recently adopted twoscore children now happily playing in the Grönwald school; thinking of her past triumphs and wondering if ever again she would walk illumined through her blue curtains to transport her enthralled audiences back to the land of gold. As her once-nimble feet faltered and her body seemed wracked with unending anguish, she confessed that she felt "very miserable and defeated."

Lady Kennet [Kathleen Bruce] in her autobiography, *Self-Portrait of an Artist*, speaks of the "terrible days and nights when a fierce cloud of doubt, fear, and loneliness would descend upon Isadora and many and many a time she would cry for death and plan suicide." Miss Bruce, with sturdy good sense, would laughingly talk her out of these depressions and remind the young dancer of the great triumphs ahead, reassuring herself the while with the thought that people who talked of suicide seldom carried out their plans. Yet one night, after a reporter had tracked Isadora down and wished to interview her, stalking outside the house hoping to catch a glimpse of the unusually retiring *artiste*, while the fearful Isadora implored her friend to dress herself *à la Duncan* and dance down the beach to throw the snooper off the scent—that evening the dancer attempted to carry out her threat.

Kathleen Bruce awoke in the night with a feeling that something was amiss. Peering in Isadora's bedroom she found it empty and then dashed down the sandy path towards the sea. The tide was out and far off she dimly saw a figure. "The sea was calm. I rushed in. The figure ahead did not move. As I neared it, calling, she turned round with a gentle, rather dazed look, and stretched out her arms to me with a faint, childish smile, saying, 'The tide is so low, I couldn't do it, and I'm so cold.'"

The watchful friend took her back to the villa and having stripped off the dancer's dripping walking clothes, rubbed down her swollen body, made hot drinks and filled hot water bottles, she got her back into bed, soothed and consoled her. A few days later Isadora's lover arrived at the villa unannounced, "gay, amusing, and argumentative," and there was laughter and feasting. Lobsters were brought from the village, and wine, for the moment, replaced the usual milk.

The child, a little girl, was born on September 24th, 1905—but only after an abnormal, unalleviated two days of labor, the lacer-

ating tortures of which Isadora never forgot. "I have only to shut my eyes and I hear again my shrieks and groans as they were then, like something encircling me apart from myself." Radiant with the newfound happiness that followed, she lovingly nursed her baby. Looking down at it she recalled the dream she had had after first discovering that she was pregnant. The suckling infant's grandmother, Ellen Terry, "appeared to me in a shimmering gown, such as she wore as *Imogene*, leading by the hand a little blonde child, a little girl who resembled her exactly, and in her marvelous voice, she called to me: 'Isadora, love. Love. . . . Love. . . .'"

After the birth of her daughter—Craig had suggested that she be named Deirdre, recalling perhaps the heroine of an Irish play by his friend William Butler Yeats—Isadora returned to Berlin. Although her sister Elizabeth had kept her informed of the children's progress, she was naturally anxious to see them at work. She was not to remain long, however, in Berlin that winter. Frau Juliette Mendelssohn, the wife of the banker who handled the affairs of Eleonora Duse, presented Isadora to the great Italian actress whom she had always admired from afar. Later, because of the expressed interest of Signora Duse in the work of Isadora's school, Frau Mendelssohn arranged for the pupils and their illustrious teacher to give a performance in the Mendelssohn home for the Italian actress and her daughter, who acted as interpreter for Isadora and Craig.

Following the exhibition of Isadora and her gracious charges, Craig was presented to the Italian actress. Like Isadora he had already admired her from afar. More than that, he had designed a setting for Hofmannstahl's *Electra* in which she was supposed to act the year before. The production did not take place but Craig's design still remains, one of his most admired creations. Signora Duse was going to have a season at the Pergola Theatre in Florence during which she proposed to stage Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*. Through her daughter she discussed this with Craig and he was commissioned to do the sets. Isadora with the child and its nurse accompanied Craig to Florence where they settled in a small hotel near the grander one where the illustrious actress was to stay.

Although for the moment Isadora's interest in her school and her art seemed to be quiescent, the eternal question of finance once more

jerked her back to reality. A second Russian tour had been arranged which promised to refill the depleted coffers. In the meantime Craig had published his magnificent large portfolio, *Isadora Duncan: Six Movement Designs*, with its poem foreword. He was also busy with his *Rosmersholm* setting and working out ideas for his famous *Mask*, the first number of which was to be published in March of 1908.

Isadora's 1907 tour of Russia seems to have stuck in the minds of the various chroniclers, obliterating the memory of the more historically important one of January 1905 when her first appearance really made a fructuating impact upon the old-fashioned ballet of the period. Constantin Stanislavsky in his memoirs speaks of Isadora's continually mentioning the name of Gordon Craig "whom she considered a genius and one of the greatest men in the contemporary theatre." She had even written an article on him in a small Berlin theatre magazine.

For she never did anything by halves. Besides dancing her apostolic way through Russia and preaching and dancing her own gospel of the "Dance of the Future," she fervently carried the word of the new Gospel of the Theatre According to Craig. Stanislavsky tells how she told him: "He belongs not only to his country, but to the whole world, and he must live where his genius will have the best chance to display itself, where working conditions and the general atmosphere will be best fitted to his needs. His place is in your Art Theatre." The ultimate result of Isadora's enthusiasm—Craig's epoch-making production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre in January of 1912—is now a matter of theatre history.

## Chapter VIII



AT THE BEGINNING OF 1908 ISADORA SELECTED A BAKER'S DOZEN OF HER most advanced pupils to accompany her on another tour of Russia. With increasing pressure from the Prussian bureaucracy, the school was not going as well as she had hoped when she had founded it. Her soaring ideal was still far from becoming a fixed reality. Not that she lacked influential friends and admirers. The Grand Duke of Hesse, for instance, came forward to place at the dancer's disposal a property at Marienhohe in Darmstadt for the erection of a new school. By the time it was designed, built and finally opened in December, 1911, however, it was to pass, to all intents and purposes, into the care of the more businesslike hands of Elizabeth Duncan and her right-hand man, Max Merz. By that time Isadora's feeling for Germany had cooled, and her first continental love, Paris, seemed more free and attractive as a home base.

But in 1908, notwithstanding, or perhaps because of the rivalry between Business and Art, Isadora was intent on founding her ideal school elsewhere. She had high hopes of Russia, but in spite of the enthusiasm with which she and her "Isadorables" were received in St. Petersburg, Moscow and other towns on her tour, there appeared not the slightest hope of governmental support for such a school of the dance as she envisioned. In preparation for the tour she had taught

her pupils to dance several of the choruses of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* which was to be her principal attraction. Their artfully gracious movements immediately won all hearts wherever they appeared. As their mistress had done when she was as lithe as they, they carried the onlookers dancing back to the Land of Gold.

Undaunted by her lack of success during this third tour of Russia in finding aid for the foundation of a new school, Isadora turned to the scene of her first appearance in Europe. Arrangements were made by Charles Frohman for her and the girls to appear in London for a short season in the Duke of York Theatre. On July 6th they opened with *Iphigénie*, and as the *London Sketch* announced under a full-page spread of pictures, they conquered the city. "Two hours of dancing alone is a formidable thing for an audience to face. But Miss Duncan and her beautiful little pupils make everyone who sees them wish that the two hours were four." They became the rage of London, and Isadora at the same time became a center of controversy.

Shortly before the arrival of the Californian dancer in London, another Californian girl was appearing at the Palace Theatre Vaudeville billed as the creator of modern classical dancing. She was Maud Allan who, when studying music in Berlin, had seen Isadora dance and decided that she, too, could cast off her shoes and skip as lightly as her compatriot in the measures of the "Spring Song," the "Blue Danube Waltz," or any other of the lyric pieces of the New Dance repertory. The 1905 production of Richard Strauss's opera set to Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*, and the sensation caused by the Dance of the Seven Veils, apparently gave Miss Allan the further idea of adding that erotic dance to spice her meager program. In this she was not alone. Wiggling, quasi-oriental *Salomé* dancers became as common on European and American music-hall stages as Chinese jugglers or Swiss bell ringers.

To the uninformed general public there was a rivalry between the two Americans. Sides had to be taken. It was useless to cite dates and point out that long before Maud Allan was ever heard of, Isadora Duncan was introducing the so-called "classical" dancing at the New Gallery and elsewhere in the English capital. Letters were written to the newspapers. Even the staid literary weekly, *The Academy*, whose chief specialty seemed to be scholarly book reviews, entered

the lists with a brief editorial. The writer of this after telling of having seen both dancers perform went on to remark that:

The difference between the dancing of these two ladies is the difference between the real thing and a not very successful imitation. It is quite ridiculous for Miss Allan and her representatives to pretend that her dancing is not a deliberate imitation of Miss Isadora Duncan's. In some dances she is moderately successful, but the overwhelming superiority of Miss Duncan's dancing must be at once evident to anybody possessing the smallest taste or knowledge of the technique of dancing. With regard to the *Salomé* dance, Miss Maud Allan is entitled to what credit she may achieve for having invented it. In our opinion it is a repulsive performance, and one which we should not consent on any account to witness a second time.

Naturally this blast brought many letters to the editor including one from a G. W. Hanson, who said in part, and for the record: "Had Miss Allan (or Miss Durand, as she was then called, whom I remember in Berlin as a diligent student of Miss Duncan's methods) confined herself to imitating the graceful work of this lady, and had she not endeavored to assimilate the art of Mesdames Trouvnova and Mata-Hari, she might have succeeded in producing results of considerable merit."

Thus, while her so-called rival continued to perform her slight repertoire of pretty dances set to light music and her *Salomé*—not set to Strauss's music—titillating her music-hall audiences, Isadora continued with her pupils to please the crowded houses at the Duke of York's. The engagement was successfully prolonged to the end of July. It was necessary then to leave London, an August engagement having been previously arranged in New York.

In spite of charmingly vague promises by aristocratic patronesses, no concrete plans were made for the foundation of Isadora's dream school in Great Britain. The Duchess of Connaught had told the dancer that Queen Alexandra was anxious to have the girls remain in England; other great ladies, who were to be equally ecstatic over the Diaghilev Ballets Russes a few years later, expressed great interest in the proposed Duncan School. But as such an institution could not be founded on airy promises, and as the powerful Gerry Society precluded the appearance of the youngsters with Isadora in New York, the children of the Grünwald school were sent back to the continent. A generous American—Mrs. W. E. Corey, who occupied Jerome

Bonaparte's "Chateau Villegennise" at La Verrieres near Paris—allowed the children and Elizabeth Duncan to occupy one of the dependencies of the chateau.

As Isadora explained to an American reporter: "It seemed a shame to leave their school standing empty in Berlin . . . but I wanted the children to escape the somewhat confining influence of . . . bureaucratic Germany . . . I can assure you that sometimes the red tape becomes very wearisome to a free-born American."

So, after a ten-year absence from her native land, and having in the meantime made a name for herself on the European stage and spawned a strange brood of specious imitators, Isadora returned to New York in August, 1908. For as knowing a manager as Charles Frohman, who had made a contract with her in London, it was strange that he chose to present her at the Criterion Theatre during a dead period of the theatrical year. Moreover, many of her imitators, even less talented than Maud Allen—with bodies uncorseted and lightly draped in their own ideas of Greek tunics; legs and arms bare, and feet unshod—had already artlessly pranced over vaudeville stages and Chautauqua lawns. For some reason they all invariably tripped lightly to Mendelssohn's "Spring Song" as Isadora herself had done at the beginning of her dance career—and, of course, *Salomé* which Isadora had never even thought of dancing. They certainly offered no encouragement for the general public to see the original dancer.

Isadora herself was neither a sensational, *Salomé*-dancing vaudeville performer nor the usual Broadway attraction. Even *Vanity Fair* sometime before her New York appearance could dismiss her with: "You won't catch Isadora dancing at a Vaudeville Theatre or any such low place. No, she performs her Terpsichorean stunts solely for the wealthy and the cultured. . . ."

*Variety*, the mouthpiece of Broadway, waxed satirical after her first New York performance at the Criterion Theatre, when the program consisted of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* with a small orchestra conducted by Gustav Saenger. The last few days of the Criterion engagement saw the dancer divide her program between Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* and her interpretations of three Mazurkas, three Preludes, and two Waltzes by Chopin:



Now comes along Miss Duncan with an immense success in Europe as a recommendation and offers Broadway an entertainment of lofty pretensions to art. . . . The exposition—one could no more call it an entertainment than a public school lecture on Egyptology—opens with a ten minute overture by an orchestra of thirty pieces. . . . After this Miss Duncan makes her appearance. The stage is set with classic simplicity, enclosed on right, left and back with draped curtains of monotonous gray [blue] and the lights are dim except where an orange-rose colored calcium illuminated the center. Miss Duncan is a person of generous proportions, but handles herself with a smooth, gliding grace in her slower movements, and with a surprising lightness in the quicker tempos, which quite disguises her weight. Her movements, particularly in the manipulation of her hands and arms, are exquisitely graceful—one might describe it as the sublimation of Delsarte. In this phase the performance is delightfully perfect, but allowing that, is not it a rather flimsy foundation for an hour and a half of theatre captivity?

The whole aid the audience has in understanding the dances is contained in the program list which describes them in order as *Air Gai Lento*, *Moderato*, *Allegro*. An added note to the last two illuminates thus *The Maidens of Chalkis Play at Ball and Knucklebones by the Seashore*. *Knucklebones*, from the graceful pantomime of Miss Duncan is in some way related to craps. Some of the other dances are *Choeur des Prêtresses*, *Dance des Sythes*, and *Passacaglia*. How can such names be?

*Variety* closed its review by quoting a few of the comments heard in the lobby. Two of them, by well-known Broadway figures of the period, give the tone. Abe Thalheimer: "Miss Duncan is a very neat worker." William Harris: "Who handed such a lemon to Frohman?"

The advance publicity—"The Sensation of the Continent and the Rage of London, Miss Isadora Duncan in her Celebrated Classical Dances."—and the general theatre and orchestral arrangements did little credit to the much-touted managerial perspicacity of Charles Frohman. The New York appearances during the sultry evenings of August and the subsequent out-of-town engagements were alike in their sparse audiences and the lack of any such enthusiasm as the dancer had aroused on the continent. To the relief of both Frohman and Isadora, the six month contract was cancelled.

Greatly discouraged, the dancer was ready to return to Europe. On the advice of the sculptor, George Grey Barnard, however, whose acquaintance she had made and whose further conquest she vainly sought, Isadora decided to remain for a while longer in Man-

hattan. She rented a large studio in the Beaux Arts Building that overlooked Bryant Park where the monumental Public Library building was soon to be erected. There she was happy to receive, as she had done in London, Paris, Berlin, and St. Petersburg, the homage and friendship of the *élite* of the city's artistic and literary coteries. There, too, came the distinguished musician and conductor, Walter Damrosch, and with him she decided to have one more try at storming the city.

The eminent music critic of the *Tribune*, H. E. Kriebel, writing in his paper of November 7th, noted that when Isadora arrived and gave her performances at the Criterion "many persons of taste saw her performances and spoke of them with enthusiasm. But the multitude remained away. . . . Yesterday afternoon it was found that the great theatre (the Metropolitan Opera House) could not accommodate the thousands who wanted to see this lady revive 'the Greek Art of two thousand years ago' as the announcement said." The multitudes that remained away from the three-week season at the Criterion Theatre seem to have converged on the Metropolitan Opera House. Hundreds who had been unable to book seats or buy standing-room space milled about the doors, making it difficult for the "carriage trade" to enter the opera house that afternoon of November 6th.

But Mr. Kriebel, like many of the European musical critics, was against her dancing the three movements of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony*: "No lover of the Symphony was present yesterday but he deplored the twofold humiliation of the glorious creation of Beethoven. . . . The exhibition which Miss Duncan gave was dignified, beautiful, moving, but nevertheless, it put something painfully like an indignity upon the symphony. . . ."

On the other hand, Reginald de Koven, the composer who was then music critic for the *World*, wrote of the same performance: "I cannot better praise Miss Duncan's art than by saying that what she did was no infraction on the dignity and beauty of Beethoven's immortal work."

In his long critique Kriebel had quoted Charles Kingsley on what the ancient dance must have been like, and to many of Isadora's New York friends, especially the poets Percy MacKaye and William Vaughan Moody, it was a very apt and happy description of her art.

"A dance," said Kingsley, "in which every motion was a word, and rest as eloquent as motion; in which every attitude was a fresh motion for a sculptor, and the highest physical activity was manifested not, as in coarse pantomime, in fantastic bounds and unnatural distortions, but in perpetual delicate modulations of a stately and self-contained grace."

With the adulation of her artist admirers and the praises of the poets cheering her on, Isadora went from New York to other large cities. In the national capital she danced before Theodore Roosevelt who was then in the last months of his presidency. With the rest of the elect he enjoyed and applauded her various creations, yet there remained many in her audiences who enjoyed neither the dancer's free, bare-limbed movements, nor her "desecration" of musical masterpieces. For evangelical "blue-noses" she was anathema: a jumping Jezebel no better than she should be; a ripe subject, of course, for pulpit denunciations which could always be counted upon to receive wide newspaper coverage and excellent verbal publicity for the righteous who thundered them.

In her interviews following these outbursts, Isadora always spoke to the reporters at length of her own deeply felt moral ideas about the beauty of her art and its regenerative powers to make the world a finer place. She told of her school, which she explained was being supported with the dollars earned by her public appearances. In speaking of the school and the high hopes she had for its future, she would point with pride to the photographs of the youngest pupil, Deirdre. In the presence of the reporters, however, she took no proprietary interest in this child. The little girl she had suffered so much in bearing was always referred to as the daughter of Gordon Craig or, more pointedly, the grand-daughter of the much-loved actress, Ellen Terry. Free love, like the free dance, was not looked upon with much approval in the dancer's still puritanical native land.

## Chapter IX



AT THE BEGINNING OF 1909—HAVING SAILED AWAY FROM NEW YORK on the last day of December, 1908—Isadora arrived back in France, happy to see her daughter Deirdre again and delighted also to see her sister Elizabeth and the growing girls of the school. The year ahead augured well. That thirty-first year of her life, and the ninth of her European career as an artiste, was to see two triumphant series of engagements at the Gaieté-Lyrique theatre, when her art was finally whole-heartedly acclaimed by the Parisian public; and she was also to meet and fall in love with the millionaire she had ardently longed for as the supposed solution to the problem of the continuation of her ideal school. This was to be the year when she was probably more written-up by distinguished writers and poets in the French capital and portrayed by more of the greatest artists than in any other year of her artistic career. Even the advent of the newly organized Russian Ballet Company, which Sergei Diaghilev was to present to the astonished Parisians for the first time, would not dim the luster of the lone American and her small group of "Isadorables," as a French poet nicknamed them.

Part of Isadora's triumph should, of course, be credited to her new manager. This astute gentleman, Lugné-Poe, an actor-manager who was the director of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, had been mainly responsible for introducing to the insular Parisians the art of the great Duse and to performances of the plays of Ibsen and other new Euro-

pean dramatists. Under his management the two engagements at the Gaieté-Lyrique were outstanding in a year that is still recalled for its theatrical brilliance.

Henri Lavedan, one of the leading French dramatists of the period, wrote fulsomely about Isadora at this time, as did many of his confreres; even politicians like J. Paul-Boncour could not refrain from publishing their praise of the dancer. Lavedan describes her as "a young woman, vital, beautiful . . . able, without the air of any artifice and without uttering a word, to hold an audience for two hours in one of the largest theatres of Paris. . . . Straight, slender as a sapling, robust hips, with legs at once feminine and virile, bust fragile, with the shoulders of a young girl, arms charming and energetic and curving like a precious chaplet from finger to throat—the head of Athena by Greuze. Thus to one's first astonished and enraptured gaze, Isadora appeared, without a suggestion of self-consciousness, yet slightly timid, modest but proud, her brow without a shadow and a faint smile in her eyes."

The novelist, Edith Wharton, also saw her compatriot perform: "I had never seen dancing as I inwardly imagined. And then, when the curtain was drawn back . . . and before a background of grayish-green hangings a simple figure appeared . . . then suddenly I beheld the dance I had always dreamed of, a flowing of movement into movement, an endless interweaving of motion and music, satisfying every sense as a flower does, or a phrase of Mozart's.

"The first sight of Isadora's dancing was a white milestone to me. It shed a light on every kind of beauty, and showed me for the first time how each flows into the other as the music merged with her dancing. All through the immense, rapt audience one felt the rush of her inspiration. . . ."

In the rapt audiences at the Gaieté-Lyrique, more numerous than ever before, sat some of France's greatest artists, as well as hordes of students from the École des Beaux Arts. Many sat busily sketching as one beautiful movement merged into another. Others, like the great sculptor Bourdelle, happily transfixed the lovely vision in their memories and later in the quietude of their studios translated them into more permanent forms. Writing later to Gabriel Thomas, who had been appointed to commission artists to decorate the new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (Isadora is memorialized there in the marble bas-

reliefs of the façade, in the interior frescoes and the murals of the auditorium), Bourdelle tells him: "To me it seemed that there, through her, was animated an ineffable frieze wherein divine frescoes slowly became human realities. Each leap, each attitude of the great artist remains in lightning flashes in my memory." And in one of the impromptu talks to his students at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, long after the famous theatre was built and decorated, the master told them: "All my muses in the theatre are movements seized during Isadora's flight; she was my principal source.

"All of you will have recognized Isadora Duncan who soars in my frieze beside the pensive Apollo whose lyre dictated her marvelous dance to her.

"With the nine different visages which I have been able to seize from many women's faces, it is still she, Isadora, who in my frieze clashes with Isadora, in the frenzy of the hymn or the surrender of the offering."

Two other artists fixed for posterity some of the movements of the dancer's performances at the Gaieté-Lyrique. The drawings of Jean-Paul Lafitte were brought out the following year by the *Mercure de France* publishing company; those of the more famous artist, Dunoyer de Segonzac, were published in a limited de luxe edition by *La Belle Édition*. In passing, it should be said that the dancer herself did not care for the beautiful silverpoint drawings which Segonzac did and which were further enhanced by a preface written by her friend the admiring poet, Fernand Divoire.

The thirty-eight Lafitte drawings, swift calligraphic shorthand notes which are only sometimes successful in conveying some of the dancer's more characteristic movements, cannot be counted among the great art works inspired by Isadora. The book containing them, however, is important because the preface is by Élie Faure whose work as an art historian and critic has long since been firmly established. He wrote:

Yes, we wept when we saw her. It was no longer to our eyes, nor to our ears; it was no longer to our nerves that she spoke. From deep within us, when she danced, there arose a flood that swept away from the recesses of our soul all the filth which had been piled up there by those, who, for twenty centuries, had bequeathed to us their critique, their ethics, and their judgments. . . .

When we eagerly watched her we rediscovered that primitive purity which, every two or three thousand years, reappears from the depth of the abyss of our worn-out conscience to restore to us again a holy animality. . . .

If Isadora disliked the delicate and precise lines of Segonzac, and had her reservations about those of the less gifted Lafitte, she was outspoken in her admiration of the pastel studies which her admirer Grandjouan made of her at various times. Twenty-five of these were selected and reproduced in facsimile on the same kind of colored handmade paper which the artist had originally used. The plates were encased in an elegant, morocco-bound, hand-tooled album, each copy having an autographed preface written by the dancer. Only fifty copies were for sale at the rather steep price of fifty dollars, or 250 French francs. This beautiful *édition de luxe* of the famous anarchist-painter was made possible, incidentally, by the money of the millionaire the dancer was to meet during the Gaieté-Lyrique season.

To the greenroom of the Gaieté-Lyrique after each performance thronged not only artists and students but also the professional and aristocratic *élite* of the city. One day also came the longed-for millionaire. He was Paris Eugene Singer, the youngest but one of the twenty-three children born within wedlock to the American sewing machine magnate, Isaac Singer. The son was not, as might be supposed, named after the legendary son of the Priam whose carrying away of the lovely Helen had caused the Trojan War. Rather he bore the classic name because he happened to have been born in 1867 in the French capital; just as one of his brothers, having been born in the American capital, was christened Washington.

He had all the physical and material attributes of a story-book Prince Charming: tall, handsome, polished in manner, with urbanity, easy charm, and a fortune which, though only a small part of his famous father's, was yet much more than ample for his needs. His education had been in England and there he had married and become the father of five children. With large houses in both London and Paris, he was not only an intimate of Queen Alexandra and English society but was also well acquainted with the leading members of the French aristocracy. His elder sister (born in prosaic Yonkers), Winneretta Eugenia, after a Vatican-annulled marriage to the Count Scey-Montbeliard, had married into the even more aristocratic fam-

ily of the De Polignacs. The youngest Singer child, Isabella, had married and regilded the *blason* of the Duc Decazes, another member of the French aristocracy.

When the blond and bearded Singer entered the star's dressing-room (having been moved by one of her usual curtain speeches whose theme had been the eternal plea for support for the continuance of her school, some of whose most beautiful members were living evidence of its importance), Isadora recalled that she had a vague memory of having met him sometime before. And indeed she had met him some eight years before. At the funeral of the aged Prince Edmond de Polignac in 1901, she had momentarily glimpsed through her tears the handsome young man who stood beside his bereaved sister in the noble family group, receiving the condolences of the throng attending the ceremonies. The De Polignacs had been among the kindest and most generous of the dancer's aristocratic patrons during her first year in Paris. They were both melomanes, well known for being as openhanded as they were openhearted to whatever was new and unusual in music.

Paris Singer turned out to be as openhearted and as openhanded as his musical sister. And, when the first series of performances had ended in March, Isadora and her pupils were magically whisked off to the French Riviera, where the generous millionaire had a villa and where his sumptuously appointed yacht was anchored. Springtime in Nice and a round of balls and festivities. Then a cruise to Italy in the yacht, *Lady Alicia*, which the owner rechristened *Isis* after the Egyptian goddess, a name which he always later used in referring intimately to Isadora.

This taste of the fleshpots did not, however, cause the dancer to forget that she had contracted not only to reappear for the summer season at the Gaieté-Lyrique, but also to make another brief tour of Russia preparatory to fulfilling a contract with Walter Damrosch to reappear in America in the late fall. Thus the end of May found her back in Paris preparing for a series of evening performances alone and with her pupils, supported by a large symphony orchestra which the great Édouard Colonne had been engaged to conduct.

Although the Diaghilev Russian Ballet and Opera Company opened at the refurbished Châtelet theatre and had such attractions as Chaliapin, Felia Litvinne, Pavlova, Karsavina and the astonishing



Nijinsky, Isadora, dancing alone or in company with her handful of girls, held her own at the Gaieté-Lyrique through the month of June. Indeed there were many who preferred her simplicity and austerity to the choreographic intricacies and *tours de force* set in the lavishly brilliant decors of the Russian troupe. Nor were the comparisons lacking of the dancing of the American to the music of Chopin and the dancing of the Russians in the ballet *Chopiniana*, then titled *Les Sylphides*, which Fokine, directly inspired by Isadora's dancing, had created for the new company. The comparisons drawn between the two were not always to the advantage of the Russians.

There were things, naturally, which the Russian ballerinas did, singly or in company, which the Californian dancer could not do or attempt to do—this from aesthetic reasons as well as physical ones. By the same token there were things which she did that they, with all their years of technical training, would never be able to attempt. They could not charm their audiences by merely walking across the stage, for the walk of even the most graceful dancer shod in traditional ballet slippers—which tend by their construction to make the wearer walk on the heels—always seems singularly lacking in grace.

As for a ballerina attempting to do a dance without the guidance of a choreographer and the supporting aid of the musical rhythm supplied by an orchestra or an instrument, that was something unthinkable. There was one famous dance without music which Isadora did one evening at the Gaieté-Lyrique. The orchestra had long since gone but hundreds of remaining spectators still clamored for more encores. To them, at last, she said that she would dance the philosophy of her life. A poetic description of this unique performance was set down by the pen of Fernand Divoire:

Silence. The musicians have left. Silence of the fervent crowd which, the performance ended, has been for an hour acclaiming her, wishing to see her once more.

"I am going to dance the philosophy of my life," she says. She dances in silence.

She is before a bronze door, is she not? An invisible bronze door, yes, that's it. Invisible and impassable as destiny.

She hurls herself against it. To beat it down with a blow, with a push, with the tremendous dash of youth. And now she lies there, downed.

She returns obstinately, with all the power of one who wills.

And always rejected . . .

And always conquered by the solid, dumb door.

Will she never give up? Will she never rest? Broken and motionless as an armful of sheathed wheat?

She finally doubts.

She supplicates.

She gathers all her strength. Oh, it is perhaps her last effort; perhaps the last stone to be thrown; her last pile of faggots to be thrown to the philosophic flames; and then there is nothing more.

But the last twig must be burned.

She gathers all her strength.

AND THE DOOR HAS SHAKEN. Unhinged. IT FALLS TO EARTH.

And that is what is called Victory.

Oh, may this same will be given us, to cast down, at the same cost the door of Destiny.

At the end of the *Gaieté-Lyrique* season, the dancer made a brief tour in Russia alone. Her friend was unable to get his passport fixed up for the trip. Upon her return to Paris towards the end of August she settled in with the millionaire at his house in the *Place des Vosges* and remained with him there until the time came for her to set forth to fulfill her contractual engagements in America. Walter Damrosch and his orchestra were to supply the musical accompaniment, and the tour was to be managed by Charles Douville Coburn, a young Southerner later to make a name for himself in the theatre and in motion pictures. Isadora's many friends, who had been reading of her successes in Europe, were happy to welcome her back to New York.

Among the many poets, artists, musicians who flocked to pay her homage was the great Yiddish actor, Jacob Adler, whose theatre on the lower East Side was a temple of dramatic art for his compatriots. Adler, as with his French and Russian peers, Mounet-Sully and Stanislavsky, was the object of Isadora's admiration, and, having danced for him in her studio, she went further and decided to dance in his theatre for a highly enthusiastic non-paying audience. Adler wrote:

When I first saw Isadora Duncan dance in her studio, I was overcome. I had always thought that dancing was a light pleasure, a joyous thing, sometimes a vulgar thing, often a thing which provoked the sensual instincts that our Hebrew morality has tried for ages to suppress. But I suddenly saw something very beautiful and I found myself weeping. Something happened to me that will change my whole life.

There was an exaltation and an inspiration in her. All seemed to be inspired with the spirit of Miss Duncan. I had what seemed to me was a peep into a new Paradise and then I felt that everything that I had seen, I had not seen; and everything that I had to this time heard, I had not heard. It was a new world. I saw that she was one of the rare persons of this world, and that her art could in some strange way, bring completeness to what was otherwise discouragingly incomplete.

While the exaltation of the dancer caused Adler and others to write thus and inspired poets like Witter Bynner and Percy MacKaye to pen poetic tributes to her dancing, the critics and the general public were not yet completely conquered. Carl Van Vechten, who was just starting his writing career as a metropolitan music critic, still harped, as did many others, on the dancer's choice of music. "More or less of a sacrilege," he termed her inclusion in the performance of *Iphigenia in Aulis* of the chorus of the priestesses from the opera *Iphigenia in Taurus*. But Taurus or Aulis meant little to the average spectator—it was all Greek to them. They either were enthralled by the great beauty of the dance or else were disgusted and shocked to their puritanical depths by what they considered the semi-nudity of the dancer.

Some, like the pastor of a wealthy St. Louis congregation, scathingly denounced the dancer without ever having seen her dance! This Methodist-Episcopal man of God told his flock that it was "an everlasting honor to St. Louis that her centennial celebration passed with so decorous a regard for all the proprieties." And then he lit into the visiting dancer, saying that it was to the shame of "queenly" St. Louis that her exhibition was possible in its midst; that Beethoven's stately symphony should be so degraded by a "middle-aged woman who had been for years associated with the Parisian stage." (It should be kept in mind that in the American "Bible Belt" *Parisian* was a dirty word at that period.) The majority of the pastor's colleagues supported him.

"Is it not fully time," the smug gentleman went on, "that with unmistakable emphasis the multitudes of good women and clean men in this imperial city stamp such an exhibition with utter and absolute condemnation?" Multitudes of "good women and clean men," however, not only in St. Louis and New York, but also in the other large towns in the East and the Middle West, continued to go to the vari-

ous performances of the clergy-denounced dancer. But despite these various performances and the happy meetings with her friends in New York, Isadora's heart was in France with her daughter and with Paris Singer, whose child was growing larger within her. With great satisfaction she sailed away on the *Lusitania*, accompanied by her brother Augustin and his little daughter Temple.

## Chapter X



AT THE BEGINNING OF 1910 ISADORA WENT OFF WITH PARIS SINGER on his yacht *Isis*. Their destination was Egypt; they planned to sail up the Nile in a *dahabeah*, as far as Wadi Halfa. Everything was even more glorious than she had imagined. The dancer wrote Lugué-Pöe in Paris: "We have one magnificent day after another of blue sky and sun. It is as close to Paradise as anything ever could be. . . . The only thing we miss here is music; it's true that we always have with us the sound of the water wheels and the songs of the Arabs, but we long to hear Bach. It's funny, but Bach and the Egyptian temples would go very well together. . . ."

At the end of March they returned to France. A villa had been arranged at Beaulieu and Dr. Bossan was in readiness to attend the future child of the now radiant mother. Much had happened since the birth of her first child in the little, lonely villa at Nordwyk. The father of the child remained for the most part with the expectant mother and saw to it that she had everything she wished.

On May 1st, by the sunny shores of the Mediterranean, Isadora was delivered of a boy. Surrounded by luxury and the best medical care available on the Riviera, the birth had been a happy one, quite unlike the lacerating nightmare of 1905. At the *mairie* of Beaulieu the boy was registered as Patrick, a name chosen by Singer and one already borne by one of the sons by his first wife. When she was

finally up and about after the happy event, Isadora wrote to announce her joy to many friends all over the world. Among the letters was one to her revered Professor Haeckel of the University of Jena: "This boy will be a monist, and, who knows, there may be some of your great and wonderful spirit in him. We will hope so." And a few weeks later in answer to the scientist's congratulatory letter she said:

Dear Master, I thank you with all my heart for the beautiful letter and the magnificent books and photos you sent me. My baby makes good progress. He is strong and sweet. I am just about to give him the breast. He takes up every minute of my time but when he looks at me with his blue eyes I feel richly compensated. Next week I am returning to Paris and will be at the Trianon Hotel in Versailles. If you should happen to come to Paris please visit us! . . . All my good wishes, dear and great master, for your continued health. With all my gratitude and love. Isadora Duncan.

So Isadora went back to Paris, regally to install herself in the Trianon Palace Hotel in Versailles for the fashionable summer season. There was one of the Singer autos to drive her into the capital where the Russian Ballet was giving its second season, with Nijinsky still astonishing and delighting the audiences. There were galas at the Opera and performances at the Comédie Française where Mounet-Sully still subjugated his audiences with his great tragic acting. There were fashionable parties and literary salons to attend. And to cap the wonderful season that seemed a smiling and endless round of social and personal happy events, Isadora herself had her millionaire arrange a garden fête in the middle of July in the grounds of the Trianon Palace Hotel.

Great marquees were set up, the Colonne Orchestra was engaged under the direction of Gabriel Pierné to play the music of Gluck and Wagner, and a sumptuous dinner was served to about fifty distinguished guests. They were received by the hostess dressed in a floating gown which Count Fortuny of Venice had specially designed for her. Later this was doffed so that she could dance in her usual Greek tunic to entertain her friends.

From France the dancer and her lover went over to Singer's country estate in England at Paignton in Devonshire. There, wearying of the emptiness of country life, Isadora wrote to her friend Colonne

in Paris asking him to send her a musician with whom she might work. Whether from forgetfulness or as a practical joke, the French master sent over his young protégé, André Capelet, a gifted composer, who had played first violin in the Colonne Orchestra when it accompanied Isadora at the Gaîté-Lyrique Theatre. On one occasion during that season the dancer had refused to allow the *disgracieux* young man to take the ailing Colonne's place as conductor. She could not bear the sight of the awkward and physically ugly musician. The composer-conductor Gabriel Pierné was forced to take his place despite the pleading of Lugné-Poe and the dancer's friends.

When he arrived in Devonshire, Isadora, though furious, allowed him to remain. But with her own wry humor she insisted that when he played for her it was to be behind screens—in the same manner she had insisted that the tapestries and pictures of the great ballroom in which she worked be covered by her blue curtains. A fortuitous ride later in the Singer limousine over a bumpy road, which threw the exigent artiste and the unlovely musician into each other's arms, seems to have made the young man more attractive—at least physically. And as she had no doubts about the musicianship of this composer whose *Miroir de Jésus* she was later to consider a work of genius, she managed to extract, as they say, both pleasure and profit from his companionship.

Left alone with Capelet—Singer being still in bed from a stroke he had had in Paris—Isadora worked on the dances she was composing to music by Wagner and Gluck. These she danced later that year at the Châtelet before starting out on another American tour. For this American tour she again had the musical services of Damrosch and his symphony orchestra. In his account of Isadora's first Carnegie Hall concert on February 15th, 1911, which appeared in the *Times* the following morning, Carl Van Vechten, after telling his readers that "Before the doors opened there were no seats to be had . . .," said that "Miss Duncan not only was the first of the barefoot dancers, but also the last. She has not only established her vogue, but she has also maintained it."

Then, having told of the dancer's work in the various movements of Bach's *Suite in D*, Van Vechten continues:

The next number announced on the program was the "Prelude" and "Liebestod" from *Tristan und Isolde*. Instead, however, of rapping for

attention from his orchestra, Mr. Damrosch asked the audience for attention, turned about, and made a little speech. . . .

"It has been my intention," said Mr. Damrosch, "simply to play this music from *Tristan*. Yesterday, however, Miss Duncan modestly asked me if I would go through the "Liebestod" with her. She has, as is well known, a desire to unite dancing to music in a perfect whole, as an art which existed in the time of the early Greeks. Whatever she does now, of course, must be largely experimental. However, the results which she has already achieved with the "Liebestod" are so interesting that I think it only fair to set them before the public. As there are probably a great many people here to whom the idea of giving pantomimic expression to the "Liebestod" would be horrifying, I am putting it last on the program, so that those who do not wish to see it may leave."

After the applause for this little speech by the famous conductor, Miss Duncan danced the "Bacchanal" from *Tannhäuser* and the "Dance of the Apprentices" from *Die Meistersinger*, which had to be repeated. Then she did her interpretation of the "Liebestod." Very few music lovers or Wagnerians left the theatre. As for her performance of this scene, Mr. Van Vechten records the fact that it "puzzled those who knew the music drama, and did not interest those who did not," speaking rather omnisciently for the two thousand onlookers.

A few days later, with the aid of the Damrosch orchestra, a small chorus, and with Miss Florence Mulford singing the arias of *Orpheus*, Isadora gave her first American performance of the quasi-totality of Gluck's opera. The famous flute obligato of the Elysian Fields scene was superbly played by the great flutist, Georges Barenre to the immeasurable enjoyment of both the dancer and her enthralled audience.

Much as she loved the excitement of her American tour, however, and the pleasure of seeing her old friends and making new ones like David Bispham, the concert singer, her heart was in Versailles with the two children. They had been left in the care of the nurse and a young art student, Christine Dallies, whose brother-in-law, Mario Meunier, secretary to Rodin, was later to act in the same capacity for Isadora. It was with joy that she arrived in France and went straight to see the children. Little, blond-curled Patrick was not yet a year old, but Deirdre, just over five, was already giving evidence of her Terpsichorean heritage.

Sometime in 1909 Isadora had bought the enormous studio of the muralist Henri Gervex. He had had it constructed in its own grounds



on the rue Chauveau in Neuilly, near Paris, in order to work on the spacious murals which he had been commissioned to do for the Imperial Russian household. Deciding to live there upon her return from America, Isadora had the place redecorated by Paul Poiret. No longer the simply-attired philhellene, she now appeared in public in dresses specially designed for her by the better known dressmakers of the capital.

With her millionaire she had worked out plans for a new Paris theatre. The famous architect Louis Sue was called into consultation, and plans were drawn up for a building to be erected on a corner on the fashionable Champs-Élysées. The theatre which Isadora and Paris Singer envisioned was to be the home of great masterpieces of the drama played by international figures of the stage, such as Duse and Mounet-Sully. It was also to be the headquarters of the dancer and her school. But these high-minded plans found no favor with the Marquis de Dion and other prominent Parisians who felt that that section of Paris was not the place for a commercial theatrical undertaking. They would be greatly surprised were they to awake today and see how commercialism—in the guise of garish movie theatres, five-and-dime stores, and such—has changed the face of the great avenue. So the Duncan-Singer plan remained a plan. All that remained was the beautifully made model which the architect had constructed.

But life went on, with gay parties at the vast studio in the rue de Chauveau and pleasant trips to Atlantic ports and Venice and Egypt in the *Isis*. Performances were given at the Châtelet at the end of 1911 with the Colonne Orchestra of one hundred performers under the direction of Gabriel Pierné. These were marred by the Paris Opera's forbidding the dancer to perform the *Tannhäuser* "Venus-burg" music whose rights they held. There was also an evening when detectives were stationed on the stage to see that the dancer's veils stayed in place. A fastening had broken the night before and the result had shocked many in the audience whose complaints crowded in to the Préfecture de Police!

## Chapter XI



AT THE BEGINNING OF 1913, ISADORA, ACCOMPANIED BY HER PIANIST Henner Skene, again made a tour of Russia. As before, she was royally welcomed by her artistic and aristocratic friends in St. Petersburg and Moscow. In the latter city she heard from Stanislavsky of the tremendous success of Craig's production of *Hamlet* which had finally been staged exactly one year before at the Art Theatre. Although not a full realization of the great theatrical artist's tremendous vision of Shakespeare's classic, it nevertheless marked a point in the history of theatrical art. Isadora was proud of the small part she had played by introducing the two famous men of the theatre to each other.

In the town of Kiev, at the close of her Chopin program she insisted that Skene play the "Funeral March" movement of the *Opus 35 Sonata in B flat minor*, following a macabre dream which she had had the night before. "A singular premonition of what was to come," said Isadora. The "what" was luckily hidden from her and long forgotten when she stopped off to dance in Berlin later and pick up her two lovely children waiting there with Elizabeth, all ready to return home to the pleasant house and garden in Neuilly.

For the month of March a series of performances had been arranged at the Trocadéro to be followed by another series at the Châtelet theatre, which faced the Sarah Bernhardt where she had

made her Paris theatrical debut more than a well-filled decade before. At the vast Trocadéro she gave her version of the Gluck *Orpheus* which attracted all Paris not only because of her dancing but also because of the vocal beauty of Mounet-Sully and the tenor Plamadon who took part. Each night the great auditorium was packed to the roof and the production was enormously admired.

After the Trocadéro successes Isadora and Mounet-Sully went on to the Châtelet in the month of April, there to do her version of Gluck's *Ipheginia*. Again all Paris flocked flower-laden to cheer them and the happy girls down from the Darmstadt school. At the other end of the town the handsome new Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was being inaugurated. There in various forms (the murals of Maurice Denis in the auditorium, the frescoes paneling the halls, the bas-relief on the façade by Bourdelle, and other works of art) representations of the dancing figure of Isadora bespoke the impact the Californian had made on the French artists.

Never had Paris seemed so gay; never had life seemed so full of joy. Isadora's brother Augustin, and his wife Margherita, with their little boy Angus were there. The aging Queen of Naples came to tea occasionally at the studio. There were also visits from Rodin and Bourdelle and other admirers and friends of the dancer who all delighted in watching the growing children romp with their gracious and adoring mother. Plans were discussed for the theatre which Paris Singer had commissioned. Isadora's secretary, the poet and Hellenist Mario Meunier, had been asked to do a new translation of Euripides' *Bacchae* in which Augustin Duncan was to play Dionysus. A life made up of Love and Art in a country where both were held in high honor—what could be more desirable? Oh never had life seemed so full of ineffable joy! And then the gods struck. . . .

On Saturday afternoon, April 19th, 1913, before the clocks rang out the half-hour after three, the two angelic joys of the dancer's life lay with their Scottish nurse at the bottom of the Seine. After a morning spent in Paris with Singer and her brother, Isadora had returned to her house and had seen the children and their nurse into a recently hired limousine which was to take them to Versailles. Having tucked them in and shuddered momentarily as she playfully kissed Deirdre through the cold window glass, she returned to the

house. The car drove off, and at the angle of the Boulevard Bourdon which runs along the Seine a taxi suddenly hove in view. Stopping short to avoid it, the chauffeur found that his motor went dead. Getting out to crank it the poor man suddenly saw the unbraked car hurtling towards the river. With no parapet to stop it the car with its precious cargo crashed into the gray-green waters of the Seine. A few eddies and then silence. Then screams from the now hysterical driver. And a rush of bystanders, horrified by what they had seen.

A road mender, who had been seated with some other workers at a café, jumped into the muddy river, about forty feet deep at that point. Although exhausted by a first attempt he made a second one to try and find the car and open the door to get the helpless passengers free. Another man in a motorboat attempted, without success, to find where the car had gone down, being finally warned away by the police who had appeared on the scene. At last the car was raised. The little girl and the nurse, her face distorted with horror, were both dead. The boy, whose little head had been pressed to the nurse's breast, still seemed to have some life left in him.

After long and vain efforts by the doctors who had been summoned from the nearby American Hospital, he, too, was pronounced dead. The children and the nurse were sadly borne to the hospital and it was left for Augustin to convey the heart-breaking and horrifying news to his sister. The implacable thrust of the gods left the all-too-human mother crushed; her heart broke and her reason seemed to totter. Doctors were summoned and two of them remained in constant attendance upon her. Singer came rushing from the Place des Vosges to mix his weeping grief with hers. The city enveloped her with its loving pity; and grieving hearts all over the world—those to whom she had been beauty and grace incarnate and those who only knew her as a name—went out to her. She was able to write shortly afterwards: "My friends have helped me to realize what alone could comfort me—that all men are my brothers, all women my sisters, and all little children on earth my children."

While family and friends sorrowfully busied themselves with the funeral details, the house was filled with floral tokens from friend and stranger alike. The large studio was buried in great wreaths

and bunches of white lilac and roses; the very path leading up to the house was covered on either side with great bunches of marguerites which students and others had laid there. Letters and telegrams from all over the world came in—communications which Isadora could never bear to read. Two, however, she kept with her till her own tragic death. These came from Gordon Craig then in Florence. In one of his letters Craig wrote:

Isadora dear—I never shall be able to say anything to you. It is a mysterious thing but when I begin to think of you or speak to you I feel as though it was as unnecessary as if I should speak to myself. This feeling grows. And as I seem to be a man mad about something outside myself—I no longer seem to count. A glimpse of myself—if I dared to lift a veil—might kill me. I have left myself (as it seems to me who dare not look) and what is me is a bag of sawdust with a head on one end and two leaden feet 'tother end—and so on—I seem to be outside myself. Supporting myself by one arm or by the hair—I like a bunch of furies—and with some strength too for I have serious things to attend to, get done, and then go. My life as yours has been *strange*—you are *strange*—*but not to me*. And my darling I know how you can suffer and not show more than a smile—I know your weakness which is that of a little, dear little fool—for I, a big fool, have looked at you. I know your strength too—for I who can taste strength have seen all yours—never was there one so weak or so strong as you—and all for Hecuba. My heart has often broken to see your weakness. Large chips (you couldn't have noticed them, for I as you, will never show them). My heart has often shaken with *terror* to see your strength. For my heart and your heart are one heart and an utterly incomprehensible thing it is. *I want to be with you*—and it was only to say that that I write so much— And as I am with you, being you, what more is there to be said. Let us not be sorry for anything—or where shall we begin. You and I are lonely—only that. And no matter how many came—or shall come—you and I must be lonely—our secret. I kiss your heart.

It was Isadora's desire that the children be cremated. French law, however, formally declared that only those who had expressed the desire in writing before their death could have their bodies so treated. Only through the friendly intervention of the powerful Gaston Calmette, the editor of *Figaro*, was she able to achieve her desire. And so, after a beautiful musical interlude by the Colonne Orchestra in the immense flower-filled studio, the bodies of the two children and Miss Sim, their nurse, were borne through the silent streets of Paris to the crematorium of the cemetery of Père La Chaise.

Sometime after the dismal ceremonies were over and while still numb from the harrowing events, Isadora was taken by her brother Augustin and her sister Elizabeth to the island of Corfu in the Adriatic. The Turkish-Balkan war had recently ended on the neighboring mainland, leaving in its wake death and desolation. Raymond Duncan and his Greek wife, Penelope, had decided that they should go and offer what aid they could to succor the homeless and the starving in the ravaged province of Epirus. Isadora thought that she might forget her grief by being near them and helping also. From the Villa Stephanie on Corfu after arriving she wrote to Louis Sue on May 14:

Dear Friend:

We are here in a villa in a hill overlooking the sea—completely isolated—one can walk miles among the olive trees without meeting *anybody*.

I have spent two very difficult weeks—it is so difficult sometimes. Horror itself conquers me and in spite of all my efforts I fall into emptiness—in a sort of hell—it is terrible—I've read Maeterlinck's last letter on Death—I try to wear myself out with long walks—but night comes always when I cannot read any more or think and I fall a prey to tortures. What is surprising is that the body still lives—in spite of the fact that I drink nothing but milk—it agrees with me perfectly and I'm merely getting stronger; if I could only get ill it might be a great relief.

I would like to go to Epirus—to help the poor, but Paris [Singer] who at first was very enthusiastic about the idea, doesn't want me to—He's in London.

My little brother Raymond with Penelope—have gone to Epirus—on foot with nothing. They're going toward Janina, what courage! They told me they would be back in a week and tell me the exact state of the country and people—then if possible we'll raise a subscription to help them. What do you think? They say there are a thousand families dying of hunger. I thought that I might go there and do something for the children. If Paris would come it would be simpler—but even alone I can perhaps do something. They say it's a new country—magnificent—I even dreamed of founding a big school there—an artists' colony.

Tell me what you think—there will soon be a road going from Vienna to Athens—this new country has perhaps a great future.

I am awaiting Raymond's return—I will write you. It is so beautiful here—I would like so much if, instead of sending you these stupid words in my bad French, I could send you the view from my window—on the wide space of the sea—I can see right to the mountains on the opposite side which seem to float in the azure between earth and heaven—like a vision of a promised land. . . . Sometimes looking out on it I think that

maybe I'm dead with my children and have entered Paradise—and I feel them close to me—and then comes again the cruel physical suffering—my eyes will never see them, my hands never touch them again, and I see once more the poor little things waving their little hands—in the automobile driving off—and I want to scream. . . .

Write me a line, it will do me good—I think of you so much. All that I know of you is strong and fine.

May the work that you do there be blessed.

Isadora.

The summer on the paradisaical island passed but there was no waning of the mother's grief. Paris Singer came down from London but his presence was only an added means of recalling unhappy memories of what might have been, if. . . . At one moment in an antique gesture she cut off her hair, which had turned white, and cast it into the sea. And day after day she went on endless walks and returned to lie awake in the night hearing the voices of the two silenced infants.

From the island she went to the mainland where her "little brother Raymond" was attempting to bring order to the chaotic conditions in the wrecked hamlets left by the retreat of the Turkish soldiers. Tents were erected and field kitchens were set up to feed the destitute population. Wool was bought on Corfu and distributed to peasant women who spun it by hand and wove it on hand looms. The rugs and blankets they made were later sold to buy more wool. Beyond contributing funds there was little that Isadora could do. Upon her return to Paris she wrote a small brochure and an article, which appeared in the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*, appealing for aid to help her brother's work.

She described the country as a place "of striking beauty which by its astonishing profile and the grandiose lines of its mountains and the mysterious atmosphere of its valleys . . . gives to the traveller a feeling that he is visiting some unknown planet far from this world. A landscape of romantic grandeur that was so dear to Lord Byron. . . . Here it was in the guise of Childe Harold that he wandered sad and solitary." And there she, too, wandered sad and lonely in that countryside where nature seemed, she said, "to exhale some immense dolor."

Her own unassuaged pain was ever present. No amount of com-

passion for material sufferings of the Epirote peasants could ever fill the void in her heart or make her forget for long the two little creatures, flesh of her flesh, now dust in Paris. The long walks in the desolate valleys peopled with other suffering humans trying to reconstruct their labor-filled lives; the empty sleepless nights filled with nagging thoughts of what might have been; the vain attempts to find solace in reading her favorite poets and philosophers—all were as nothing to make her forget.

She wrote to her friends who had known the children. It was one way of communion with them: "I have always known that my children were the best part of my life," she wrote to George Maurevert in Nice. "All the joy, the strength and the inspiration of my art. Now I feel that my life and my art died with them. . . ." Then she went on to recall them:

Each morning, very early, Deirdre and Patrick came to my room singing and dancing. . . . Only on that last morning did I hear Patrick weep. I went to their room. The child was sad and did not want to take his breakfast. I took him in my arms and consoled him. Then he consented to eat. He had just learned to speak; he said: "Bread and butter, mama, bread and butter." And then we laughed and played together. And I suggested we take an automobile ride together. . . . We went to Versailles and then came to Paris. Then after lunch I put them in the car to send them back with their nurse. I kissed them and they waved their little hands to say goodbye. . . . And then for a joke I kissed Deirdre's lips through the glass. The glass was cold against my lips and I suddenly had a strange apprehension—but the automobile went off, and a few moments later they were all dead. . . .

And now I struggle with all my strength but I still see them in the car. . . . I must live for those who love me but it is really a torture too terrible. What shall I do?

These past days I have tried to read *Death* by Maeterlinck. Will you tell him that his book has done me good?

Restless, and finding no solace amid the ravaged and arid valleys with their homeless people, Isadora finally left with her sister-in-law, Penelope, on a sea trip which took them to Constantinople and back. Still restless and depressed, she then sailed up the Adriatic to Trieste. There her car awaited her to take her slowly to Switzerland and later to Paris. Once installed there in her studio from whence the lifeless bodies of the two children and their nurse had been taken only a few



months before, she vainly attempted with the aid of her pianist, Henner Skene, to get back to her art. But again defeated by memories she went off to seek respite through travel. Again she left Paris and fled to Italy, far from the unhappy memories of the house and the sound of the Seine that tranquilly flowed nearby.

Wandering about in Italy, she received a telegram from her old friend Eleonora Duse who was spending the summer at the seaside town of Viareggio. Duse was not only a great *tragédienne* but a great soul, well acquainted with suffering. She read to the distraught Isadora from the Greek tragedies and from Shakespeare and enveloped the sorrowing mother in the great folds of her compassion and understanding love. Henner Skene came down from Paris and played music which the two women passionately adored. Often Isadora wept while her companion sang Beethoven's *In Questa Tomba Oscura*. At last in this atmosphere of understanding she finally decided that life had to go on. She danced the Adagio movement of Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique* for Duse. On the Viareggio beach she met and fell in love with a beautiful young sculptor who turned her thoughts from grief and death to love and a new life.

Even to the great-hearted Duse this act was at first incomprehensible. Writing to their mutual friend and manager, Lugué-Pöe, the Italian actress confided to him:

I do not understand, my friend, when this woman dares to will the *remaking* of her life!

Nothing of that which is irreparable is understood by this magnificent and dangerous creature! Her generosity is quite as great as her error of imagination.

"The *irréparable*" which, nevertheless, exalts the tone of life—no—she does not even see it and she wishes to throw herself back into life, bleeding life . . . and see again . . . what? the smile of the dead child, *in another* smile of another child that will be hers!

Be sorry, my friend, for my littleness, for I understand nothing of *that will*, of that folly, of that supreme wisdom.

Isadora Duncan has on her side the Supreme Strength—greater than life itself. . . .

Eleonora

The young artist, already engaged to be married, passed out of the dancer's life almost as suddenly as he had entered it. She with

her thoughts momentarily turned from the grave went off down to Rome. There, squired by the faithful Skene, she remained through Christmas until the fateful year, 1914. At the end of the year Isadora returned to Paris and to Singer, then staying at the Crillon Hotel. The millionaire had become the owner of an imposing building on the outskirts of Paris which had housed an elegant restaurant and hotel, Le Pavillon Paillard at Bellevue. This he gave to Isadora to be the foundation of a new attempt to set up her dream—her school of the dance. The place was furnished and the great blue curtains hung in the large dining room. A large staff was engaged and plans formulated for the building of a similar theatre to that which Louis Sue had designed to be erected on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. The Bellevue pavilion was to be the long-desired center where not only the art of the dance would be taught, but where the great artists of the theatre would act in the tragic masterpieces of the stage and where great music would be played and sung. Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with its great choral paean to the brotherhood of man would at long last be played, danced, and sung by a multitude of initiates.

The large house rang with the happy laughter of the old and new pupils. With Mounet-Sully the older girls from the Darmstadt school gave a performance at the Trocadéro. Each Saturday was Visitor's Day when the elite of Paris came to see girls dance to the more lyric pieces of Schubert and Bach and Brahms and to a new suite of dances, pictures of old German towns, which Florent Schmitt had composed. Rodin often came over from his house on the opposite bank of the Seine, sighing that he had not known such lovely dancing children earlier in his artistic career. Considering the great artists and musicians who came to the school, great things were envisioned.

Alas for the frailty of human plans! Before the school year had half gone, France was in no mood for dancing. The rumblings of the approaching tragedy began at the end of June with the murder of the Austrian Archduke at Sarajevo. Within a month Europe was an armed camp; all the brave plans for the new school had gone by the board. A group of the eldest girls—veterans of the first school at Grünewald—were sent off to the Singer house in Paignton in Devonshire. Isadora, her time approaching, remained at Bellevue. To the rumble of mobilization which took her doctor away, her third child

was born, lived precariously a few hours, and died. All the high hopes and the ardent dreams were crashing down before the juggernaut of war. The Bellevue pavilion was turned over to *Les Dames de France* to be used as a hospital. Isadora, as soon as she was able to move, sadly prepared to leave France and continue her wanderings, an errant goddess of the dance.



Part III  
1914 - 20



EUROPE—  
AMERICA—  
EUROPE



## Chapter I



WITH DEATH AND DESTRUCTION RAGING OVER MOST OF EUROPE AND with her little pupils forced to go from England to neutral America, Isadora's thoughts turned toward them and her homeland. After a brief stop at Deauville, she decided to follow them there and arrived in New York at the end of November on the small Cunarder *Franconia* which had sailed from Liverpool. A doctor from the military hospital in Deauville, with whom she had become friendly, accompanied her from France to England and saw her off. In New York she was met by her sister Elizabeth, whose German school was now settled in America, and Augustin who had had the task of bringing over Isadora's Bellevue pupils from Singer's house in England two months before. It was a sad and sick sister they welcomed home.

Isadora's friends—like Mary Roberts, editor of the art magazine, *The Craftsman*, the poet Percy MacKaye, and the musicians and artists whom she had known on her previous visits, all flocked round her once more. An enormous studio was found at the northeast corner of 23rd Street on Fourth Avenue. This had been the former Polytechnic Institute, but furnished with couches with multicolored cushions and draped with the Isadorean blue curtains it became, if not the equal of the spacious Bellevue, at least a haven where the dancer could rehearse with her pupils and receive her friends. It was rechristened *The Dionysian*. Soon Isadora was receiving the beloved Ellen Terry, who told the children stories, Gabrilevitch and other

musicians, who played for the guests, and Julie Culp and other great singers, who poured forth their voices in songs that momentarily shut out the horrors of the warring world.

A Dionysian magazine was later published, in the form of a handsomely printed pamphlet, which had articles by Isadora herself, by the American artists, Robert Henri and George Gray Barnard; poems by Percy MacKaye and Witter Bynner; and brief pieces by Nietzsche, Mary Roberts, Bolton Hall and John Collier. There were also reproductions of sketches by the famous artists Bourdelle, Grandjouan and Van Deering Perrine.

An article by Mrs. Roberts, which she wrote for inclusion in the *Dionysian*, gives a description of the new school:

A great space, silent and high, separated from the world by curtains of blue; soft lights streaming down rose scarves; back in the shadows low couches in brilliant colors—this is the setting for Isadora Duncan's school in the heart of New York.

A man sits at the piano. A Greek figure of ageless beauty, of ageless tragedy stands nearby.

With the first chords of the music, lovely figures of youth appear, outlined against the blue, moving with gracious freedom; splendid white limbs gleam through grey veils; upturned faces are remote with ecstasy. As the music floods through these fluent forms, they are no longer separate dancers, but the spirit of youth bearing to the world rich gifts of beauty. Through these liberated bodies flow the melody of all the world, the joy of all the ages, bringing hope for the future of all races.

Isadora Duncan "teaches" her pupils by a gesture, a glance, a softly spoken word; and the response is magic. For she gives unsparingly from her own spirit of inspiration, courage, exaltation, and the message is received by free spirits in free bodies.

At the beginning of the new year a group of her friends—among them Mabel Dodge, Walter Lippmann, and John Collier—swayed by the dancer's idea of starting a great school in New York, thought of bringing together Isadora and the mayor of New York, John Pumoy Mitchell. This gentleman was not one of the common run of political figures who usually fill the mayoral chair of America's largest city. He had been elected on a reform ticket and was backed and beloved by the liberal element. It was felt by those surrounding the newly arrived artist that Mitchell, if properly impressed, might accede to a request for the use of one of the city's enormous and idle armories.



Through Lippmann and Collier and some others, the afternoon was arranged when Mitchell was to be presented to the famous dancer. It was assumed that she, by her great charm, her apostolic zeal for the art of the dance, and by the visual aid of the group of elder pupils who would certainly dance for the distinguished magistrate, might be able to persuade him to grant his aid to the founding of the American school. Alas, with the perversity she was so often to show, her charm worked the wrong way; her eloquence was turned to the support of a Mrs. Ida Sniffen, whose criminal case was then filling the newspapers; and that day the children did not even dance an exercise for the mayor from whom such great things were expected.

After the fiasco, Walter Lippmann wrote from the Harvard Club a tart letter to Mabel Dodge, one of the movers and shakers of the idea. He said:

Dear Mabel, I'm utterly disgusted. If this is Greece and Joy and the Aegean Isles and the Influence of Music, I don't want anything to do with it. It's a nasty, absurd mess, and she is obviously the last person who ought to be running a school. . . .

I went into this because like a damn fool I deluded myself into thinking that we could have one spot of freedom and beauty. I should have known better. These spots exist only in the imagination we weave about performers like Miss Duncan. I should have known better than to be dazzled into a short cut to perfection—there are none, and Isadora is not the person to show the way.

But Isadora was not to be balked of her idea of founding a school in New York. To her the *Ideal* was always more important than the *Real*. Always carried away by the warmth of her audiences which had been exalted by the beauty of her gestures, she would descend from her artistic pedestal to the soapbox of the speechifying, articulate woman with a mission. "If I were only a dancer I would not speak. But I am a teacher with a mission. . . ," she told an audience at the Metropolitan Opera House after she and her pupils had danced. "I have received hundreds of letters begging me to stay and continue my work here in America. These letters have come exclusively from the poets, painters and poor people—none from the rich." This denunciation of the rich was to be the leitmotiv of many similar speeches.

In passing she made mention of one exception: Mr. Otto Kahn. The millionaire Maecenas had made her the offer of the empty

Century Theatre on Central Park West where she could carry out the plans which she had envisioned for the unbuilt theatres in Paris. But the shell of the great, almost new theatre, and the grandiose plans for making it the center of the arts of music, dance, and great drama, needed more than talk. Perhaps in no other city in the civilized world was money so necessary for the launching and upkeep of such a scheme. Great though the number of the seats were in the Century, they could never, sold at the low prices proposed by Isadora, bring in sufficient income to keep the venture going very long.

"As the Greek dances were the forerunners of the Greek drama, so we believe we are laying the foundation for the development of a great universal art. . .," Isadora told her enthusiastic Metropolitan Opera House audience after innumerable curtain calls. But she was telling them her dream. Faced with the reality of running an enormous theatre, one of the largest in the city, the dream was crushed. The orchestra seats uprooted so that a larger space could be left for the movements of the chorus in the antique dramas that were to be staged, the covering of the stage boxes with the famous blue draperies, the use of the backstage offices to house the pupils—all these horrified the theatre stockholders and alerted the city fire department. These actions made headlines but did not add to the income.

The beginning of the season, it was said, started with \$50,000 and ended disastrously with a debt of \$12,000. There had been beautiful performances by Isadora, alone and with her girls. There had been unusual performances of a prosy translation of *Oedipus Rex* for which the poet Percy MacKaye had written the lyric choruses, and performances of a version of *Iphegenia in Aulis* done by the poet Witter Bynner. There were performances, too, of Chopin played by George Copeland. There had been devotional performances to celebrate Easter with sacred music and Biblical readings. But always speeches by Isadora, sometimes querulous, sometimes amusing, and almost always an attack on the rich and those in authority who refused to aid her in her mission of restoring the dance to its ancient glory. "In the earlier days," said one critic sadly, "when she merely danced, she did not cultivate such discourse. Her dancing spoke for her. . . ."

For the great majority of her audience her unique dancing *did* speak for her. All the extraneous matters which she attempted at the Century were of little worth compared to the slightest of her gestures.

The spoken word—whether Biblical readings, the poetry of Poe and Blake, or the poetic translation of *Iphigenia* and the anonymous colloquial adaptation of *Oedipus*, lacked the genius of projection which made her dancing a thing unmatched in the theatre. Perhaps, if her friend Gordon Craig had been in charge of the purely theatrical end of the programmes, the result might have been different.

"Isadora was surprised and grieved," said the critic H. T. Parker of the *Boston Transcript* in an article called 'The Sorry End of Mistaken Ventures,' "to discover that her public took little pleasure in these well-intentioned but austere exercises that measurably recalled the 'lyceum entertainments' of a vanished New England. She was equally disillusioned to discover that it listened impatiently to sorry singing of choruses of Gluck and Schubert by her choir. . . . Isadora sits in humiliation that she relieves by resentful discourse to deaf ears."

The burden of these resentful and often rambling discourses was the lack of aesthetic appreciation by the American millionaires who would not come forward to support her efforts and help her found another school. The rich who occupied the more expensive orchestra and parquet seats were dullards. "My work is only appreciated by the people in the gallery because they are intelligent," she would proclaim to the cheers of these who had paid their quarters for admission to the topmost seats of the Century. She would invariably go on to say that it was against her artistic feeling to step out of the picture and make a speech, and then end by coyly asking the audience to forgive her for having talked so long.

For the moment her dancing was stilled as she sat amid her packed trunks with her entourage of pupils, unable to depart from New York until the most pressing of her debts were regulated. It was her intention to go to the unfinished house in Athens and remain there until some sort of order and peace had returned to the war-torn world. There was little thought given to the fact that Greece herself, though far from the central struggle, was in the midst of an internecine fight between the entrenched pro-German Royalist Party and the pro-Allies Venizelists. After her friends and well-wishers—headed by the banker Frank Vanderlip, of the First National Bank, and Ogden Reid, the newspaper publisher—had raised enough money to pay off the most insistent creditors and provide for fares on the *Dante Ali-*

*ghieri*, which sailed from New York on May 9th, 1915, another obstacle arose.

When the Dionysian band reached Naples, Italy was merely a few days away from joining France and Britain in the fight against the Central Empires. As most of the pupils held German passports there could be no question of their remaining as enemy aliens in a belligerent land. The nearest and surest refuge being Switzerland, it was to that hospitable country that the refugees went. There at Zurich a pension was found for the pupils while Isadora went on to Paris. Later, a few performances were arranged with Isadora and the girls. With Italy now on the side of the Allies and with Greece also on the point of entering the struggle, the war would soon be over. Or, at least, so they thought.

## *Chapter II*



WITH A NEW ACQUAINTANCE MADE IN SWITZERLAND, ISADORA DECIDED to go down to Greece to see what the possibilities were of installing herself in unfinished "Kopanos." Athens she soon discovered to be a hectic area of intrigue. A political tug of war was going on between the court and the political followers of Venizelos who wished to line up their country on the side of the Franco-Britannic allies. King Constantine, who had studied in Leipzig, was not only a brother-in-law of Kaiser Wilhelm but had also been appointed, only a few years before, a Field Marshal of the Prussian Army. As such, he and his wife, Princess Sophia of Hohenzollern, and the majority of the court, were understandably pro-German.

The number of Allied and German intelligence officers with their often double-crossing agents and hangers-on was so great as to be comically incredible. Spies spied upon spies. Propagandists wove webs of fantasy. Obviously the Greek capital was no place for the apostle of the dance; and though her social life continued with gay dinners for friends from the court and the artistic and musical circles of the city, Isadora decided finally to return to Paris. But not before she had put in her bit for Franco-Britannic propaganda.

In a memoir written after her death by her friend Alexander Philadelphus, then head of the Greek National Museum, he records that "In the Hotel Angleterre where she was living, she became the

herald of the Entente and Venizelos. The accents of the *Marseillaise* transformed her into a Maenad . . ." These accents came from a Angelo Voutsina record being played on the small portable gramophone which was always part of the dancer's luggage. On this occasion she had started the machine going to counteract the *Hoch der Kaiser* toasts which came from the table of some German officials in the room where she was giving a dinner party.

Philadelphus goes on. "After dinner, followed by all her guests and carrying a French flag she went forth into the Sintoyma Square. There in the middle of the mob she began to sing the *Marseillaise*. Then she made a speech. And as most of the people didn't understand her language she asked me—I, a Constantinist—to translate into Greek a flaming praise of Venizelos! It was really tragically comic." And it became more so as the exalted dancer led the straggling mob of excited Athenians to the closed house of the Greek premier. It was quite evident that Greece was not the ideal place to sit out the war. If sit out the war she must, Paris seemed to be as good a place as any.

After many detours, Isadora returned to Paris and for a while settled at the Hôtel Meurice where she came down with typhoid fever. Later she took a large apartment on the Avenue Messine and installed herself there, making the place gay with her usual screens and colored scarves and draperies. Through the end of 1915 and the beginning of the following year, Isadora played hostess not only to her many friends who still remained in Paris but also to innumerable young men in uniform who came back from the front *en permission*, as well as the ambulant wounded from her Bellevue house. Maurice Dumesnil, who was to accompany her a few months later to South America as her pianist and musical director, tells in his book, *An Amazing Journey*, of one evening when an unknown crowd of Bohemians came to the "open house."

These unexpected and unknown guests were distinctly out of place among the elegant friends of the house. Naturally the intimates expected that the hostess would order them thrown out, but the Bohemians looked hungry to her. She ordered instead that food be brought for them by the butler. He returned shortly afterwards with food and wine which he had bought somewhere, and after the motley crew had eaten and washed down their free meal with wine, they took their

leave. To the reproaches of her intimates Isadora replied, according to Dumesnil, "Oh, the poor things, they are artists, and they were so hungry! It was the least I could do. Who can tell? Perhaps among them is a future Carrière or a Rodin." For the dancer never forgot that she had, in her younger days, often gone hungry. Her generosity was of the heart and hand as well as of the mind and remained always open, although it sometimes appeared quixotic to the onlooker.

Mention of Carrière recalls the fact that there occurred at this time an episode that belongs in a tale of *La Vie de Bohème* or a Greenwich Village story of the depression days. Having heard of the dancer's imminent departure for a South American tour, the landlord informed her that everything in the apartment except her clothes and personal belongings would be held. This presumably until the back debts for rent were fully paid. When the poets, René Fauchois and Fernand Divoire, heard of this and realized that Isadora was mainly concerned about her valuable canvases by the artist who had been one of the first to praise her when she arrived in Paris in 1900, they decided to act.

With the aid of Maurice Dumesnil, who acted as lookout on the avenue, the two writers went to work. While Fauchois searched for a taxi, Divoire, working in the apartment, roped the valuable paintings. When Fauchois finally returned with the car—having had to hunt down the length of the Boulevard Haussmann at that pre-dawn hour to find one—Divoire lowered the canvases one by one from the balcony overlooking the side street. When the canvases were all installed in the cab—the largest having to be held on the outside by Divoire standing on the running board—and Dumesnil had headed off two friendly *flics* who were making their nocturnal rounds, the conspirators drove off to the Hôtel Meurice. Luckily the policemen knew Isadora. She often had had coffee sent down to them on cold nights or on late evenings when there was danger of being warned about *tapage nocturne* in the crowded apartment.

For the moment, though, Isadora was not concerned with parties. She had agreed to lend her prestige to a fund-raising gala which the Baron d'Estournelles de Constant was going to arrange for *L'Armoire de Lorraine*, one of the many war charities which occupied the non-fighting French. It was to be given in the vast auditorium of the Trocadéro. As it was to be her first public appearance in Paris since

the 1913 soirées so suddenly interrupted by the death of her beloved children, she wished it to be an epoch-making one. This indeed it was. For it she created three new dances which later were to be standard parts of her repertoire: César Franck's *Rédemption*; the *Sixth Symphony* of Peter Tchaikovsky; and, as her tribute to the struggle in which her adopted country was then engaged, a mimed version of *La Marseillaise*.

The emotional power contained in even the worst rendition of the French national anthem cannot be gainsaid. "The greatest musical composition ever promulgated," Carlyle called it. "And whole armies and assemblies shall sing it with eyes weeping and burning, with hearts defiant of death, despot, and devil." As Isadora danced the national hymn on that afternoon of April 9th, the German guns were battering Verdun. It could have been that the splendid orchestra of the Concerts du Conservatoire, augmented to one hundred men, would alone have roused their compatriots to a frenzy. But the emotional outburst that filled the great hall as the American dancer, proud and statuesque in her blood-red tunic and red shawl, mimed with incredible intensity the four stanzas of the heart-thrilling patriotic song, remains indescribable. Men and women—the elite of France, artists, poets, soldiers on leave, politicians—wept unashamedly and sang *Aux armes citoyens!* as the dancer imperiously, with proud, wide gestures, beckoned to a great unseen army that seemed to fill the stage at her magnetic command. At the end, as she stood filled with patriotic fury, her left breast bare as in the Rude statue on the Arc de Triomphe which had been her inspiration, the auditorium shook with the cheers of the audience.

"Part of her effect is gained by gesture, part by the massing of her body, but the greater part by facial expression," wrote Van Vechten about her interpretation of the *Marseillaise* when she first danced it in New York, thereby arousing, "as vehement and excited an expression of enthusiasm as it would be possible for an artist to awaken in our theatre today." He says further: "In the anguished appeal she does not make a sound . . . but the hideous din of a hundred raucous voices seems to ring in our ears. We see Félicien Rops's 'Vengeance' come to life . . . and finally we see the superb calm, the majestic, flowing strength of the Victory of Samothrace. . . . At times, legs, arms, a leg or an arm, the throat, or the exposed breast



assume an importance above that of the rest of the mass, suggesting the unfinished sculpture of Michael Angelo."

From Switzerland came a call a few days later. They wished to have her repeat her performance there and in Lausanne. As this might be a means of earning money to pay for the pension where the pupils were staying, she consented to go there between her first donated Trocadéro performance and the similar second one which had been immediately scheduled for the last day of April. In Switzerland she saw the self-exiled Romain Rolland, for whom she had a high admiration, but was prevented from approaching him by her patriotic French entourage. And although the stolid Swiss could not be aroused to the pitch of her Trocadéro audience she felt that her success augured well for her approaching South American trip for which she had recently signed a contract in Paris.

After her return to Paris and the second Trocadéro appearance, she began to prepare for her voyage. Her passage was booked on the French liner, the *Lafayette*, which was to sail from Bordeaux. On the way down from Paris the violinist Jacques Thibaud boarded the train at Tours to the delight of the dancer. She and her accompanist, also a friend of Thibaud, were able to attend his recital at Bordeaux because their liner, in view of the war regulations, was not scheduled to leave the port until after midnight. The liner was barely caught before the gangplank was hauled away, and after a week ploughing the submarine-infested Atlantic they arrived in New York.

When she finally arrived in New York and went to the Plaza Hotel, she was immediately surrounded by her old friends. Percy MacKaye was then in the midst of the final preparations for his open-air masque *Caliban*. This was to be staged for a week at the re-arranged Lewisohn Stadium to celebrate the Shakespeare tercentenary. It was to be acted by a large cast of distinguished American and English actors aided by many hundreds of amateur singers and dancers dressed by Robert Edmond Jones. The various settings were the work of the Viennese-American, architect-decorator, Joseph Urban. The music had been composed and arranged by Arthur Farwell and was to be played by a large orchestra.

Hearing about all this from MacKaye, and although the programs had already been printed and no time was left to publicize her appearance, Isadora decided that she, too, should be allowed to honor

Shakespeare. Had she not, in a sense, started her professional career by dancing the fairy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? MacKaye was delighted with the idea and it was arranged that the dancer should appear sometime during the first night to dance her tribute to the great dramatist.

In the second action of the first interlude—the theme being Greek—was a scene from the *Antigone* of Sophocles and the great second chorus from the play. MacKaye had translated the words of the chorus beginning, "Many are the wonders of time, but the mightiest wonder is man . . ." and Arthur Farwell had set it to music.

It was to this that Isadora decided to dance, appearing suddenly and unannounced at the northern end of the vast stadium ground circle. Slowly, half walking—a walk as moving as her dance—half dancing, she moved the two-block length of the open field, catching up and holding her enormous audience until she disappeared in the darkness at the final inevitable words of the chorus:

All, all hath he mastered, and all that may come  
He meeteth with cunning and power; but only  
Death hath he failed to master:  
Death is the master of man.

The simple and moving dance—never repeated—Isadora considered one of her greatest public triumphs. But South America was calling as were some of the unpaid debtors of the ill-fated Dionysian season of the year before. Before the latter's voices became too strident, Isadora had sailed from Brooklyn on the *Byron*, ahead of schedule, accompanied by her brother Augustin and her musical director Maurice Dumesnil.

## Chapter III



ALTHOUGH THE *Byron* WAS FAR FROM BEING A TRANSATLANTIC luxury liner, the voyage was not without its physical and gustatory agreements. For one thing the Marquis de Polignac had sent a case of his family's Pommery-Greno champagne as a going-away gift for the dancer and her entourage. Also several young boxers were on board whom Isadora passionately admired for their vitality and animal beauty, and soon made friends with. There were long lazy days in the sun with no thought of dunning creditors and with anticipatory concern for the new worlds to conquer.

Apart from the boxers, whose appeal was merely physical, the dancer made another new friend in a Spanish painter, Ernesto Valls. Like his then much talked about compatriot, Blasco-Ibáñez, he was a native of Valencia. Isadora was acquainted with the Spanish writer whom she admired more perhaps because of his ardent republicanism than because of his literary standing. Valls also knew his fellow townsman who became, in a way, the catalyst for their friendship. Isadora admired the young artist and found him well-bred, lively and intelligent. As was often the case, she found a "genius" in him which she was prepared to spread before the world. He on his part thought, as so many other artists before him had done, that she was also a genius, a modern goddess, the reincarnation of Terpsichore.

So with a court of admirers about her she happily spent the seem-

ingly endless voyage in her element. Brother Augustin, the keeper of the exchequer and general fraternal Cerberus, could always be persuaded to descend at the various ports of call—Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Montevideo—and seek out the Pommery agents to renew, for hard cash, the De Polignac gift-case of champagne. Finally the ancient tub which had brought them safely, if slowly, from Brooklyn, reached the city of Buenos Aires at the beginning of July.

The first jolt Augustin and Dumesnil received after landing was to learn that the stage material had not arrived. Isadora also learned that the first performance was scheduled a week later at the Colisseo Theatre and had already been sold out. In the unarrived freight were the stage carpet and famous blue hangings, as well as the orchestral scores for Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony and the other larger works in her repertoire. These, of course, might conceivably be borrowed, as they later were, from the library of the Buenos Aires Conservatory through the kindness of its director, Señor Alberto Williams. Piano scores, also, would be easy to find. But the question of the carpet and hangings was more serious.

As the 12th of July was approaching, there was no prospect of any ship arriving before then, and it was finally decided to try both Waring & Gillows and Maples, the Argentine branches of the well-known English furnishing establishments. The cost of the inferior material—in the matter of color and texture, that is, but the only stuff obtainable at such short notice—was about four thousand dollars. Four thousand dollars was unavailable at the moment and the material had to be charged.

In the meantime, while waiting for the first concert there was a gay social life. Three famous French musicians were then in the Argentine capital as cultural emissaries from their government. Of the three—Camille Saint-Saëns, Xavier Leroux and André Messager—Isadora was well acquainted with only the last named. Together they lunched together and drove about the Argentine capital. With other friends she had made there, she was also shown the town's livelier and lower side. Her dancing of the Argentinian national anthem in one of the better-known night clubs, while it brought forth cheers from a majority of the astonished onlookers, also enraged her impresario. Taking advantage of a clause in the contract which forbade her to dance publicly anywhere else but in the theatre chosen by him, he immedi-

ately wanted to cancel the contract. Through the diplomatic intermission of Dumesnil who pointed out the fact that the house was already sold out with hundreds of prospective auditors awaiting the next performance, the matter was grudgingly arranged for the time being. By this time Augustin was on his way back to New York.

But the matter did not stay arranged. The press criticisms were not agreeable; the house receipts fell; and after a heated speech from the stage at her Wagner evening—which she obstinately insisted upon dancing with another conductor replacing the reluctant Dumesnil—the impresario refused to hand over the final receipts. They were to be attached and the theatre material (Maples was still unpaid) was to be held also.

With her six-month contract cancelled, the dancer was finally engaged by another impresario who promised a tour in Uruguay and Brazil. But there was an enormous hotel bill which the dancer, with no mind for such mundane details, had allowed to mount to staggering proportions since her arrival in Buenos Aires. With a promise of immediately sending money from Montevideo after the first performance there, and with the deposit of her large emerald and her ermine coat as security, the disheartened dancer—but nevertheless optimistic in her fashion—left for Montevideo.

The atmosphere and the reception in the Uruguayan city were utterly different from those of Argentina's capital. Although the first performance got off to a cool start, by the end of the evening the dancer had managed to get the audience into the enraptured mood which she invariably obtained in Paris. When she danced the *Mar-seillaise* the whole audience stood singing the stanzas as she mimed them and cheered her wildly at the end. Then as encores were shouted for, a band of young enthusiasts rushed the platform still singing. Two of them played the piano, much to the astonishment of Dumesnil, and finally, as a fitting end to her triumph, the enormous crowd which waited at the stage door escorted her to her hotel.

The financial results from the series of performances were meager. The impresario knew his tricky business down to the last decimal point of the monies he swore had to be paid out—to orchestras which sometimes did not even appear, for advertising posters which were only left-overs from some forgotten ballerina and merely had Isadora's name and the date of the concert pasted on them, and for

percentages which had to go to the theatre or the charitable group which sponsored the first performance. When they finally reached Brazil, having been given a cheering send-off at the pier by a great crowd of Montevidean admirers, Dumesnil had the good fortune to meet a Brazilian pianist, Emile Lemberg, whom he had known some years before in Paris at Pablo Casals' house.

With Lemberg, wise to the ways of South American impresarios, stationed in the box-office, the receipts were not allowed to be channeled off into unbelievable and unjustifiable percentages. After the first performance, which had to be an all-Chopin one with piano—the municipal orchestra having refused to play without being paid in advance—there was the usual *Marseillaise* performance and the incredible number of encores only halted by a managerial order extinguishing the lights of the theatre. The audiences of Rio were even more enraptured than those of Montevideo. The critics were, as Isadora later expressed it, "Dithyrambic." She was once more being heralded "Isadora la Divine."

Antonio Ferres, writing in the *Rio Gazeta de Noticias*, enthusiastically said that during the execution of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide*, Isadora interpreted phrase by phrase the gentle music: "Interpreted! One knew not if it was she who interpreted the music or if on the contrary, it was the music which attempted to translate her attitudes, now sorrowful, now joyful, now sad, now nostalgic.

"For when Isadora is possessed by Dionysus she is no longer a human being. She is a cosmic expression. She is a universal fluid. She is, above all, an unknown force. She is original, unexpected, more sensed than understood. She is a vertigo which bears our higher psychism towards intangible spheres. . . . She is emotion itself personified and moving. . . ."

Finally, at the end of August, Isadora danced her farewell performance in Rio. The *Journal de Commercio* of September 1st, 1916, telling of her adieux when she danced Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin and Liszt, said that she danced them "in a manner that was light, suave, gracious, noble, uplifting, dignified, playful, supplicating, sobbing, tragic, ecstatic, dolorous and heroic!"

The artiste was recalled more than thirty times by an audience of quivering young people—it was the apotheosis, the divine consecration of her art by youth. Finally, from the topmost part of theatre,

the youthful poet, Heraldo Pedemeiras, recited in French the following words:

Before you take your leave, Eros of the rosy fingers, wait and hear the winged words which an adolescent is about to speak. May you hear through my voice all youth singing; all our great marvelling youth.

Oh, Divine One! We bless thee for having with thy silver feet awakened the hidden wonders, and filled our cups to overflowing by thy divine dream.

O Beauty! The eurythmics of thy movements shall remain forever before the eyes of all those who have come here to adore thee. Goddess risen from the sea! For us thou hast been a golden Aphrodite, a clear-eyed Pallas, an Artemis rejoicing in her arrows, the springing Iris, messenger of Zeus, lovely as the flower of the Cruel Adolescent, the running nymph gathering roses between the marble vase and the dark cypress.

And thou wert for us also, our loveliest hours, our laughing joys and our pale sadnesses, and all the great Youth which age has not yet faded! As a woman thou wert the Argive Helen.

And as thou leavest this land after having been crowned by her hands, thou mayst say that we are Greeks; we too celebrate the Dionysiac Goddess, the joy of men, and thou, Isadora, the Divine! I give thee my life!

The noisy cheers of the students and the rest of the much-moved audience filled the theatre as the poet ended his tribute. Standing immobile on the stage the dancer made no effort to stem the tears which coursed down her cheeks. Then, wiping them away, she made a brief, typical Isadorian speech expressing her enthusiasm and gratitude for this and the previous receptions which she had received in Rio. As the acclamations continued, says the chronicler, "Isadora interpreted the immortal *Marseillaise* acclaimed with frenzy by a delirious public.

"Then the lights were put out and the spectators descended slowly the marble stairway which led them to terrestrial regions, while the closed curtain folds over the most marvellous dream which our artists have ever dreamed. . . ."

With the success of the Rio appearances and those of São Paulo later, all seemed well. But Isadora, made more restless by cabled word from Switzerland that the pupils in the pension were in danger of being turned out because of the long unpaid bills, began thinking of returning to New York. Her accompanist had offers to remain and perform concerts with Messenger. Undoubtedly he had also had his fill of his companion's unpredictable social behavior and complete

financial instability. Easy come easy go—after the manner of the dancer's Californian forebears—was something that this Frenchman found difficult to understand. To arrive penniless in a foreign town and immediately order a de luxe rented car with chauffeur, *c'est incroyable!*

So the South American tour came to an end. The draperies and carpet which had been wandering on the high seas; the large emerald and the ermine coat were back in her possession. There were memories of triumphs such as she had known in the capitals of Europe. There were memories, too, of delightful friends made, as well as less pleasant memories of the impresarios and the Buenos Aires fiasco. There was little financial profit to show. But that seemed of small importance—at least not sufficiently so, to down her imperturbable spirit. Tomorrow was another day.

On the 27th of September, a little over three months after she had sailed away from New York, Isadora alone returned home on the *Vestris*. Her depressing and unheralded arrival in port was soon brightened by the fact, soon learned, that Paris Singer was then staying in New York, having arrived from Europe and having taken a large studio apartment on West 57th Street. Their friendship was renewed and, though not as passionate as it once had been, the generous stream of dollars began to flow and sweep mundane obstacles from the dancer's path. The outstanding debts for the pupils' stay in the Swiss pension were paid. Brother Augustin was sent to bring back the six girls—Anna, Irma, Theresa, Lisa, Margot and Erica—all that now remained of the Grönewald-Darmstadt schools.

Singer, as usual, was still able to give parties. Sometimes these were small dinners in the best restaurants in town; sometimes larger dancing parties in the salons of Delmonico and Sherry, then elegant Fifth Avenue establishments. At one of the latter parties, the dancing of the hostess doing a tango with Maurice, the well-known ballroom dancer of the period, caused a shock to the onlookers and a temporary break with the millionaire host. Isadora had learned and enjoyed the rhythms of the Argentine dance during her stay in Buenos Aires and had added a few personal earthy touches of her own which she felt the South American dance called for. "This voluptuous dance," she called it, "sweet as a long caress, intoxicating as love under southern skies, cruel and dangerous as the allurements of a tropical forest."



But the passing rift was soon patched up, and in November Singer had rented the Metropolitan Opera House for Isadora, so that she could repeat the programme which she had danced with such success at the charity affairs in Paris. No tickets were sold but the enormous house was packed from the topmost galleries filled with students to the boxes and the parquet for which invitations had been sent out to friends of the dancer and her wealthy backer, the leaders of the social and artistic worlds. Such diverse personalities as Anna Pavlova, Otto Kahn, Gertrude Atherton, the Marquis de Polignac, Mayor Mitchell, and the diplomatic representatives of the Allied nations had boxes.

Many in the crowded audience may not have quite understood or cared for her first dance, which was not a dance to them—one of the greatest of her later monumental pieces set to the music of César Franck's *Rédemption* wherein she scarcely moved at all. She merely rose from a crouching position to stand with arms outstretched heavenwards, reminding the critic Carl Van Vechten of a phrase of Barbey d'Aurevilly's: "She seemed to rise towards God, her hands filled with goodness and charity." But they warmed up progressively with her dancing of the *Pathétique* of Tchaikovsky and burst into patriotic flames with her inspired and vehement interpretation of the *Marseillaise*. Seldom has the large auditorium heard such emotional and enflamed cheering as greeted the end of that concert.

A month later, restless still and weary with the social round, Isadora sailed off to Cuba accompanied by Paris Singer's private secretary. No engagements had been made during the stay in the island; there was no thought but of swimming and motoring about the town and the adjacent countryside. On New Year's Eve she gave a small dinner party on the dining-room roof—which, when it had trailed along into boredom, was left in charge of the secretary as a substitute host. Later, in the early hours of the morning, when he had seen the last of the guests go, he went out pub-crawling, hoping to find the dancer.

Sometime later he found her at the Hotel Telegraphic about to leave in company with a young Cuban journalist, correspondent for a New York musical magazine, his Senator brother, and their followers. Then followed a scene which Isadora in her own story of her life transformed into a Grade B movie scene with no relation to

reality. Asked by one of the accompanying group to dance for them, the dancer took off her Poiret toque which she tossed aside. The small group made a circle about her and the Senator's girl went to the small upright piano nearby to thump out an incongruous tango. Standing there in the deserted room, the dancer began, as she invariably did, with her two hands crossed before her breasts. Slowly they opened out in a rounded gesture, making, as the teller of the story recalls, a lovely sight with her arms stretched out and her black silk shawl falling down in a semicircle over the long scarlet skirt of her Lucile dress. At that moment one of the onlookers, no doubt expecting her to do some high-kicking to the dance music being played, laughed nervously. The dancer stood transfixed with her arms outstretched, her smiling face suddenly transformed into a mask of agony, her body quivering. For a few moments she remained thus and then her arms slowly dropped and the smile returned to her flushed face. "My God, Isadora," said her companion, "what were you doing?" "Didn't you see?" she answered. "I was about to dance the tango that creature was playing when I heard somebody laugh. I immediately thought of the jeering crowd on Calvary and I danced the Christ on the Cross. Now," she went on, pulling the back of her black shawl over the head so that her face became almost invisible, "now I'm going to dance *Mater Doloroso*." The girl thumped on with her incredible dance music and the dancer grimly moved a few steps forward. Then changing her mind she said: "No! I'll do the Dance of Death. They're like the Gaderene swine! I'll lead them to drown in the sea." With these words she walked towards the door, looking back over her right shoulder and beckoning the sheepish crowd to follow her with the ineffable gesture she used as she danced Orpheus and called upon Eurydice to follow her from the Elysian Fields.

Once outside in the plaza with the "Swine" standing astonished about her, the Senator piloted her towards his open car. By the time she was seated there and laughing with her companion, the pianist—having suddenly found herself playing to the empty room—rushed out to the car. Isadora, in answer to her, "Did you like my playing, Miss Duncan?" looked at the heavily made-up chorus girl and said softly: "Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? . . . I have heard of your paintings too. . . . God hath

given you one face and you make yourself another. . . . To a nun-nery go. . . ." And with that the car started off to make the rounds of the outlying cafés of Havana, leaving the mute piano player standing astonished on the sidewalk.

After a few weeks of socializing, sea bathing in the warm climate, and evenings at the opera where her friend Anna Fitzhugh was singing, Isadora decided that she had had her fill of Cuba. She took the boat to Key West and from there went on to the Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach. There, between vegetating on the wide sandy beach and playing her portable gramophone in her room with the attentive ministrations of a one-time boxing champion, Kid McCoy (Norman Shelby), she received word from Singer that he had taken an option on Madison Square Garden, then standing idle at Madison Avenue and 26th Street. The letter also announced that the millionaire and Percy MacKaye were coming down to Palm Beach.

In Isadora's mind there had lodged a perverse idea that the poet-dramatist MacKaye had persuaded the millionaire to take the option on the Garden so that he would be able to stage the large masques which he then delighted in writing. He would want hundreds of actors and dancers for his casts and would undoubtedly, she said, recruit them from the Wanamaker department store girls. She would be expected to teach them! Her own idea of a school, yes. Pageants, no! Whether or not these views were later stated, the fact soon became evident that Singer did not proceed further with the acquisition. The dancer returned to New York and began to arrange for a series of performances at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Later that year she decided to make a tour to the West Coast of America. She had not seen her native town since leaving it in 1895, over twenty years before. Since that time, and more especially in the later years, her flock of imitators had performed in concert halls and vaudeville stages in her native city. Salomé dancers, Greek dancers, barefoot dancers were by that time a drug on the market. But the intelligent theatregoers of San Francisco realized that she was not to be confused with her lackluster and vulgar copyists. They gave her a warm welcome home and had the special pleasure of witnessing a performance of Chopin selections with Isadora accompanied by the piano virtuoso, Harold Bauer, then also touring on the West Coast. In his autobiography he tells how the dancing of the young

Californian had given him new insight into the rhythms of the Polish composer many years before in London when he was a young concert artist.

Her meeting with Harold Bauer was especially happy for the great pianist. When their mutual friend, the internationally known musician, Eugène Ysaye, brought them together, Bauer told the dancer that he had seen her in a private house in London at the beginning of his career. She had had, he said, without knowing it, a greater influence on his life than anyone else. And, apart from the Belgian violinist, they had many distinguished musical friends in common, for though many of Isadora's detractors insisted that she had no musical culture, it is doubtful that without it musicians of the stature of Auer, Colonne, Damrosch, Ysaye, Thibaud, Messager, Gabrilovich, and a host of others would have wasted a moment of their time even conversing with her, let alone placing their talents at her command.

Harold Bauer gives an example of her musical intuition. When they were rehearsing for their joint Chopin recital the *Étude in A flat* (Op. 25 No. 1), the dancer told him: "You are playing that all wrong. The crescendo must continue until the very end of the phrase, and you can soften it later." Bauer was somewhat nettled and said that the score clearly indicated the phrasing he played. "I can't help that," she told him, as he recalls, "with superb egotism." After a long discussion he finally gave in for the sake of the dancer's dramatic gesture. In the end he later discovered, he says, "that Chopin's MS bore exactly the precise dynamic curve" which Isadora had instinctively sensed.

## Chapter IV



AT THE BEGINNING OF 1918, THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS WAR STILL raging, Isadora, momentarily discouraged, returned to Europe. She was enabled to make the journey through the generosity of Gordon Selfridge, for she was without funds, her last manager having fled with the money gained from the final part of her Californian tour. For a while she remained in London. "The past seems but a series of catastrophes," she wrote, "the future a certain calamity, and my school the hallucination emanating from the brain of a lunatic." She felt alone and deserted. The friends to whom she wrote from London were preoccupied with other matters and made no reply to her letters.

After a brief stay in the English capital, she was able to return to Paris and settle in the Hôtel Palais d'Orsay, a few rungs down from her usual de luxe hotel accommodation. Another mortgage on the rue Chauveau property eased matters for a time and old friends like Cecile Sorel and new ones like the famous "Ace" Garros were at hand to brighten her social life. At hand, too, was her friend Christine Dallies, ever ready to cheer her up and do little chores to lighten her existence. To this steadfast soul she owed her meeting with Rummel, the musician who was to see her through another period of creativity and public appearances.

Walter Morse Rummel was not only an important concert pianist;

he was also a composer and, through his mother, the grandson of the famous American artist and inventor, Samuel Finely Breese Morse. In appearance he had the air of the younger Liszt. His virtuoso playing had a power and depth which gave his organ and orchestral transcriptions an overwhelming sweep. Debussy wrote to him after a triumphant recital in Paris in June, 1917: "You are a natural force; and as such you can go from the greatest to the smallest without visible effort. Thus you understand the soul of the great Sebastian Bach and that of the little Claude Debussy in such a way that for a moment they are able to stand on the same plane in the public mind."

Isadora, however, having no feeling for the music of Debussy, was not interested in Rummel's playing of the French master. On the other hand his poetic interpretations and powerful playing of Bach, Chopin and Liszt, as well as his transcriptions of Wagner, constituted immediately a strong bond between them. Working together in single-minded devotion they devised new programmes. Rehearsing in the large studio placed at their disposal in the Théâtre Réjane, Isadora created new monumental dances to music by Liszt, such as "Les Funérailles" and "Bénédiction de Dieu dans la Solitude." From dances already created to piano pieces by Chopin she formed a programme called "Poland Tragic; Poland Heroic; Poland Languorous and Gay." Her Wagnerian programme was revised and enlarged.

With Rummel she planned and undertook a tour of the larger provincial towns in France. In spite of her long stay in the country she had never performed in any of them. Even with the war still going, and with Paris distraught under fire from the unseen and frightening Big Berthas with their seventy-five-mile range, untouched cities such as Nantes, Bordeaux, Marseille and Nice were still productive of large audiences ready to be enraptured by the combination of the virtuoso pianist and the famous dancer of whom they had heard so much for so many years. And, as much as Paris, New York, and the South American capitals, they were thrilled by her interpretation of the *Marseillaise* with which she always closed her various performance during the war period.

In America, the six grown-up pupils were dancing together as a group, accompanied by the concert pianist George Copeland. This

American artist, like Walter Rummel, was a distinguished interpreter of the piano music of Claude Debussy. Whether through his influence, or because of their own desire to dance to something more than the lyric pieces of the romantic school which they had been taught from early childhood by their genial teacher, some of the girls wished to study the pieces of the French impressionist. To them Isadora wrote a long letter which may be quoted here to show her profound feeling for music as well as give an insight into her spirit. She wrote:

Please don't let anyone persuade you to try to dance to Debussy. It is only the music of the *Senses* and has no message to the Spirit. And then the gesture of Debussy is all *inward*—and has no outward or upward. I want you to dance only that music which goes from the soul in mounting circles. Why not study the Suite in D of Bach? Do you remember my dancing it? Please also continue always your studies of the Beethoven Seventh and the Schubert Seventh; and why not dance with Copeland the seven minuets of Beethoven that we studied in Fourth Avenue? And the Symphony in G of Mozart. There is a whole world of Mozart that you might study.

Plunge your soul in divine unconscious *Giving* deep within it, until it gives to your soul its *Secret*. That is how I have always tried to express music. My soul should become one with it, and the dance born from that embrace. Music has been in all my life the great Inspiration and will be perhaps someday the Consolation, for I have gone through such terrible years. No one has understood since I lost Deirdre and Patrick how pain has caused me at times to live in almost a delirium. In fact my poor brain has more often been crazed than anyone can know. Sometimes quite recently I feel as if I were awakening from a long fever. When you think of these years, think of the Funeral March of Schubert, the *Ave Maria*, the *Redemption*, and forget the times when my poor distracted soul trying to escape from suffering may well have given you all the appearance of madness.

I have reached such high peaks flooded with light, but my soul has no strength to live there—and no one has realized the horrible torture from which I have tried to escape. Some day if you understand sorrow you will understand too all I have lived through, and then you will only think of the light towards which I have pointed and you will know the *real* Isadora is there. In the meantime work and create Beauty and Harmony. The poor world has need of it, and with your six spirits going with one will, you can create Beauty and Inspiration for a new Life.

I am so happy that you are working and that you love it. Nourish your spirits from Plato and Dante, from Goethe and Schiller, Shakespeare and

Nietzsche (don't forget that the *Birth of Tragedy* and the *Spirit of Music* are my Bible). With these to guide you, and the greatest music, you may go far.

Dear children, I take you in my arms. And here is a kiss for Anna, and here one for Therese, and one for Irma, and here is a kiss for Gretel (Margot) and one for little Erika—and a kiss for you, dearest Lisel. Let us pray that this separation will only bring us nearer and closer in a higher communion—and soon we will all dance together *Reigen*. All my love. Isadora.

During the summer of 1918, Isadora and her new lover and pianist, Rummel, continued rehearsing and working together in the south of France. The proprietor of the Grand Hotel at Cap Ferrat placed his deserted garage at their disposal. This, with the artful covering of the usual blue curtains, was transformed into a large studio. To the intense delight of a host of convalescing Belgian soldiers, she staged a Chopin programme for them which she this time called: "Belgian Tragic; Belgian Heroic; Belgian Languorous and Gay."

Living nearby in the Villa Mauresque (since famous as the home of Somerset Maugham) was the Bishop of the *Pères Blanc d'Afrique*, Monsignor Charmetant. Upon making his acquaintance, Isadora soon discovered that he was as well read as she herself in the works of Nietzsche. Between her social visits to the Villa Mauresque and to her old friends along the Riviera and her long sessions working with Rummel, the days passed happily until her provincial tour.

This late fall tour over and the war itself having finally come to its long-hoped-for end, and with her Bellevue house now in the hands of the art school which was part of the educational system set up by the American Expeditionary Forces to occupy the idle soldiers, Isadora and her lover settled once more in the Hôtel Palais d'Orsay. There she received her French friends and many of the American soldiers whom she had known during their previous civilian careers. And when the Americans had finally cleared out of Bellevue and she was free to move in, she discovered that four years of hard and careless usage as a hospital and as a school had left the once beautifully furnished pavilion a shambles.

With the aid of Rummel she gave a Chopin Festival on July 24th, 1919, "For the Reconstruction of the Isadora Duncan School at Bellevue." The price of the tickets would be one hundred francs, it was announced, and tea would be served. But Paris with the ap-



proaching peace conference had other things on its collective mind. Moreover, Rummel, with a clearer eye than Isadora, foresaw that it would take many such performances to get the enormous dilapidated house back into shape. Its future upkeep, without a millionaire's purse, would also be a problem. He reckoned that it would take many more francs than both he and the dancer could conceivably earn. His idea was to try and sell the house.

After a three-week Swiss tour at the beginning of September, arranged by Maurice Magnus, the couple returned to Paris to negotiate for the sale of Bellevue to the French government. The price finally received towards the end of September was a mere fraction of the pavilion's worth. Had she been given the real value and been properly advised as to the investment of the sum received, she might have been able to live the rest of her brief life in affluence, but her mind did not dwell in the realms of commerce and finance.

With part of the money she was able to rent a small house in Passy, which had, besides the usual rooms for living, a small studio-theatre known as the Salle Beethoven. With vague thoughts of starting her school there, she went off with Rummel and Christine Dalles for a month's tour of North Africa. It was a happy time, with little to foreshadow the events that lay ahead. Isadora adored Rummel—her "Archangel," as she always called him—and he was able to enlarge her musical understanding and to try to assist her in her business ventures.

They returned by way of Italy at the end of 1919, and Isadora began to make plans for a series of performances in Paris with an orchestra and Rummel. But 1920 was to be a difficult and decisive year.

## Chapter V



ISADORA DUNCAN'S IDEA OF GOING TO RUSSIA WAS SOMETHING SHE had long meditated over, and it was mainly motivated by her dream of finally having a school with hundreds of children supported by a government. Without a school her life would be meaningless, she always insisted. And where better could a school of the Dance of the Future be established than in a new land where, they said, all the social and political undergrowths of the centuries were being uprooted and swept away. Where better than in a country where the court, and all its *divertissements* such as the ballet, had been wiped out at one brutal blow. Traditional forms in all the arts were being smashed and new ideas welcomed and given an opportunity to flourish.

One of the many speeches which she made during the summer season of 1920 at the Champs-Élysées theatre was preserved by her friend Christine Dallies. She had ended her Chopin programme with her rendition of the *Marseillaise* which her flower-tossing admirers had clamored for. Draped in the scarlet shawl she came down stage to the apron, strewn with great bunches of lilies and roses and small bouquets of violets and orchids. Haltingly, and in her piquantly accented French, she told her now silent audience that she had danced the *Marseillaise* because she loved France. "France is the only coun-

try that understands Liberty, Life, Art and Beauty. . . . I have great hopes for Russia. At this moment she is passing through the growing pains of childhood, but I believe that she is the future for Artists and the Spirit. . . .”

They were not there that day for her or for themselves, she went on, “but for the little children who will dance in the future.” When she spoke of her school, she said people did not understand that she did not want paying pupils. Nor did they understand why she wanted to keep them in a school. She wanted them nourished properly, both physically and mentally. She wanted her pupils to read and know the masterpieces of the world. She continued:

To dance is to live. And that is what I want—a school of life, for the riches of man are his Soul and his Imagination. Give me, ask your president to give me, one hundred war orphans and in five years I will return to you—this I promise—beauty and riches beyond imagining. . . .

When I was twenty, I loved the German philosophers. I read Kant, Schopenhauer, Haeckel and others. I was an intellectual. When I was twenty-one, I offered my school to Germany. The Kaiserin responded that it was immoral! The Kaiser said it was revolutionary! Then I proposed my school to America, but they said there that it stood for the vine . . . and for Dionysus. Dionysus is life, is the Earth, and America is the land where they drink lemonade. And who can dance on lemonade? I then proposed my school to Greece, but the Greeks were too busy fighting the Turks. Today I propose my school to France, but France, in the person of the amiable Minister of Fine Arts, gives me a smile. I cannot nourish the children in my school on a smile. They must live on fruits and milk and the honey of Hymettus. . . .

As for me, I wait. Help me get my school. If not, I will go to Russia with the Bolsheviks. I know nothing about their politics. I am not a politician. But I will say to the leaders: “Give me your children, and I will teach them to dance like gods, or . . . assassinate me.” They will give me my school or they will assassinate me. For if I do not have my school I would far rather be killed. It would be much better. . . .

This was in July. The Paris performances had been extremely successful, but the next month—August of 1920—was to bring disaster. Isadora, still deeply concerned with the idea of her school, thought once again of Greece, and she decided to go again to Athens with Rummel. With the school in mind, she cabled the pupils in America to join them, and when they arrived she said: “Let us all go to Athens and look upon the Acropolis, for we may yet found a

School in Greece." Her hopes were high, but disillusionment soon set in. She later wrote:

Alas for me! My pupils arrived, young and pretty and successful.  
My Archangel looked upon them—and fell—fell to one.

She was madly jealous and in her autobiography she referred to this trip as "Love's Calvary." Seeing the meetings of eyes and the other signs of love between Rummel and her pupil, she suffered terrible spasms of pain and rage. Sometimes she was able to rise above it all and feel "What do petty passions matter in the face of my Great Vision?"—but jealousy and passion would return again, and she actually considered suicide by a "Sapphic leap from the Parthenon's rock."

Fortunately—at least for Isadora in this "impossible situation"—the King of Greece suddenly died as the result of a monkey's bite, and the government of Venizelos (who had sponsored this visit) fell. Isadora abandoned the idea of a school in Athens and returned to Paris and her Salle Beethoven—alone.

The following year during her performances in April, 1921, with the London Symphony at the Prince of Wales Theatre, her 1920 Paris speech was repeated with variations. Usually it came after her dancing of the Tchaikovsky's "Slavic March." Isadora had composed this powerful dance in America upon first hearing the news of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Of those who saw it in London none was perhaps more impressed than Leonid Krasin. The leading Bolshevik was then in the British capital heading the Trade Commission from the Soviet Government. Following her reiterated "Give me my school" speech he went backstage to pay his respects to the dancer-speaker. Briefly and somewhat banteringly they discussed the idea of Isadora returning to Russia and founding a school there.

Krasin took the matter up with his colleagues in Moscow and later went to the dancer's hotel to propose a contract. This she refused to consider; between "comrades" there could be no contract. At Krasin's suggestion she then wrote an outline-letter to the People's Commissar of Education, Anatole Vasiliev Lunacharsky, in whose hands were also the fine arts, to whom she stated frankly:

I shall never hear of money in exchange for my work. I want a studio-workshop, a house for myself and pupils, simple food, simple tunics, and

the opportunity to give our best work. I am sick of the bourgeois, commercial art. It is sad that I have never been able to give my work to the people for whom it was created. Instead I have been forced to sell my art for five dollars a seat. I am sick of the modern theatre which resembles a house of prostitution more than a temple of art, where artists who should occupy the place of high-priests are reduced to the manoeuvres of shopkeepers selling their tears and their very souls for so much a night. I want to dance for the masses, for the working people who need my art and have never had the money to come and see me. And I want to dance for them for nothing, knowing that they have not been brought to me by clever publicity, but because they really want to have what I can give them. If you accept me on these terms, I will come and work for the future of the Russian Republic and its children.

Isadora Duncan

When he received this letter, Lunacharsky telegraphed to its writer:

*Come to Moscow. We will give you school and thousand children. You may carry out your idea on a big scale.*

In answer the dancer telegraphed:

*Accept your invitation. Will be ready to sail from London July first.*

So began for the dancer a tragicomic period of the foundation of a new school and a new life. For the moment, however, her mind was full of ideas of a Whitmanesque New World. A World of Comrades. A world where the thousandfold ranks of her new pupils would dance the great hymn of Beethoven's *Ninth*. "Adieu, old World! I would hail the new!"

Isadora was now busy in Paris at her house in the rue de la Pompe. Having heard of her decision to go to Russia, many friends came to try to dissuade her from what they considered a most foolhardy undertaking. The daughter of a former Minister of Agriculture under the Czarist regime, Mlle. Tchaikovsky, went down on her knees before the dancer. Dramatically waving a letter which her father had recently received from their former home, she cried: "Look what they are doing. Food is so scarce that the Bolsheviks are slaughtering children and hanging the corpses by their limbs in butcher shops!"

When the guests had gone, Isadora jokingly reassured her pupil,

who was to make the journey with her to the land of the barbarians: "Don't worry, Irma. They'll eat me first anyway. There's a lot of me. Meanwhile you'll manage to escape!"

Other friends such as the valiant dean of French women journalists, Madame Séverine, were more sympathetic with the dancer's plan. In an article recording a farewell party at the rue de la Pompe, she told of Isadora's saying to her:

The Barbarians said "Come to us. We have suffered terribly and we still suffer. But under the claw of the cold and the tooth of hunger we have hoped, we hope, that there will appear to us the consoling visage of Art. When Chaliapin sings we forget our tribulations. When you dance there will be a resurrection in all hearts and light in all eyes. . . . Come! The republic of the poor will do for you that which the republics of the rich could never do!"

Séverine goes on to tell of Isadora dancing an adieu for her friends:

Here she is now, she who thought to resuscitate in our midst the play of noble attitudes, the rhythm of grace in the movements of life! Under the vaporous envelope of her veils she embodies successively, inquietude, melancholy, doubt, resignation, hope. For her face is like the surface of a lake where the ripples pass, like a mirror reflecting the rapid race of the clouds. It is so beautiful that we do not applaud. Only our oppressed breaths reveal in the silence what our dumb enthusiasm carries of anguish.

With Séverine at this private farewell performance were the French novelists, Rachilde and Maurice Verne, Jacques Copeau, the famous actor-manager and friend of Gordon Craig, Christine Dallies, and Irma, Lisa and Margot, three of Isadora's pupils who also danced for the guests. Séverine said:

There are only three on this evening before the departure. But it seems as though the *Graces* of Falconet have left the pedestal where they have stood for more than a century. And these three graces here have more than line; they have the charm of life. They come and go, dancing a rondo, while over them and about them floats a scarf with which Proudhon encircled the delicate face of Psyche. It is incomparably charming, youthful and gay.

Isadora leans over to me: "And if they were five hundred, if they were a thousand, don't you think they would be lovelier still? Don't you think they would give the people something to take their minds from their blackest cares?"

"And if you are hungry?" asks a sceptic.

Isadora shrugs her magnificent shoulders and with an accent made grave by conviction: "We will dance so as not to think of it!"

Oh cricket! Delicious cricket that puts to shame the ants!

So the insouciant cricket went off from Paris to Belgium and Holland to give a few performances and thence to London. She was to be accompanied by three pupils, Irma, Therese and Lisa, but the latter two decided at the last moment not to embark on the adventure. Together with the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Désiré Defauw they gave a series of farewell performances at the Queen's Hall.

Of the many eulogistic articles which appeared in the English press, one especially pleased the dancer. It was written by the leading critic, Ernest Newman, whom she already admired for his Wagnerian writings. To Newman her dancing was a sort of sculpture in transition. He wrote:

Imagine, a dozen statues expressive, say, of the cardinal phases of despair—the poses and gestures and facial expressions of the moment in which each of these phrases reaches its maximum of intensity. Then imagine some hundreds of statues that represent, in faultless beauty, every one of the moments of slow transition between these cardinal phrases, and you get the art of Isadora Duncan. The soul becomes drunk with this endless succession of beautiful lines and groupings.

The muscular control they imply is itself wonderful enough; but more wonderful still must be the brain that can conceive and realize all these faultless harmonies of form. She seems to transfer her magic even to the fabrics she works with; no one who has ever seen it can forget the beauty of the slow sinking of her cloak to earth in one of her dances; the ripples in it move the spirit like a series of soft, mysterious modulations in music.

Her secret, so far as we can penetrate to it, is apparently in the marvelous cooperation of every cell of her brain and every movement of her face and limbs. So perfectly does the machine work that, paradoxically, we can sometimes see it working when it is quite still.

The most wonderful illustration we had of this was at a certain moment in her miming of the *Ride of the Valkyries* when, in dead mobility, she gave us an incredible suggestion of the very ecstasy of movement; something in the rapt face, I imagine, carried on the previous joy of the wild flight through the air. The sudden cessation of physical motion had the overwhelming effect that Beethoven and Wagner now and then make, not with their music, but by a pause in it.

So the last days in the old world went on. There were happy meetings with old friends like Ellen Terry, the grandmother of the dead

Deirdre, who like so many of the dancer's admirers was struck by her recent statuesque creations. "I have never seen true tragedy before," she said after watching the "Slavic March." Artists like Augustus John and Lady Scott, together with poets and musicians, crowded her *salon* at the Claridge Hotel.

At a final lunch given by Krasin and his wife at the Embassy, all fears were set at rest about the dreadful habits of the Bolsheviks. The Commissar told Isadora that the powers in Moscow had decided to place at her disposal not only the thousand children she desired but also the former imperial palace at Livadia in the Crimea.

All seemed too perfect. There would be the temperate climate of the Russian "Riviera" country where the thousand children could be taught in the open air. They would move in grace as the cypress trees move there, standing firm and moving their arms towards the blue skies; they would learn from the rhythm of the waves of the tideless sea that washed the garden walls of the many-chambered mansion where they would be installed; and over all would be the benevolent support of a forward-looking government. What more could she desire?

Maybe, after all, her great idea of seeing a thousand happy children dance the *Ninth Symphony* was going to be realized. Maybe, after all, a great wave of brotherhood, aided by the dance, would sweep out of Russia and wash Europe clean of all its internecine hatreds. Maybe. . . .



**Part IV**  
1921-1924



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RUSSIA



## Chapter I



ACCOMPANIED BY HER AMERICAN FRIEND RUTH MITCHELL, ISADORA and Irma boarded the *Baltanic* on the evening of July 12th, 1921, to sail the following day for Esthonia. On completing this first lap on their journey to Moscow, they were met by Ivy Low Litvinov, the English wife of the then Assistant Secretary for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Government. Having been welcomed, they spent the day visiting the town and returned to the boat to spend the night rather than accept the offer of hospitality at the Russian Consulate.

At midnight the following evening, escorted by Madame Litvinov, Isadora, Irma and Jeanne, the French maid, took the train for Petrograd, en route for Moscow. Their second class compartment was shared with a diplomatic courier also bound for Moscow. "Well," said the dancer to her pupil, "we're in for it now!" Farewell to drawing-room cars, private compartments, and Pullman dining rooms! No more luxurious travel, apparently, they thought, as the candle-lit train crawled along on the deteriorated tracks.

Finally the train reached the Russian border and the little town of Narva where the Soviet customs examined their passports and hand baggage. Although it was early in the morning, Isadora was already up and went wandering in the village. She bought flowers and raspberries in the market and returned for breakfast on the train. Later she went for another walk with her companions and visited the

school. Like the Pied Piper she was followed by a motley juvenile throng and, arriving back at the train, she asked Jeanne to bring out her portable gramophone. There on the station platform she gave the astonished and delighted children a concert and then a dancing lesson. She improvised a little dance for them and brought the party to a happy end by giving the children all the white bread and cake which her travelling companions had presented to her before they left Esthonia. She also gave them impulsively, with no thought of the lean days ahead, all the candy and sweet-stuffs she could find in her baggage.

Late at night the train started off for Petrograd and finally arrived there at ten the next morning. From the station the travellers were driven to the Soviet Headquarters at the Hôtel d'Angleterre. As they were obliged to remain there for the day, Isadora was able to drive about the once luxurious capital which she knew so well from her previous visits. Seeing the dilapidated palaces where she had once been entertained by Kschinskaya and various members of the nobility, Isadora became very sad. She was cheered up and delighted, however, when she came to the Winter Palace and learned that it was now being used as a hospital for children.

When the train left at midnight on the last lap of the journey, the Northern Lights were glowing brightly. The train wheezed and puffed, stopping often and long at every station and junction to let off and on crowds of peasants with their samovars, bedding, and other impedimenta. The journey between the northern city and Moscow which normally takes fourteen hours took double that time. All told, the journey from London had taken eleven days, and the train crept into Moscow at four o'clock on Sunday morning, July 24th.

No welcoming voices greeted the travellers; no wreaths or garlands. No official was present to greet the distinguished guest. She *had* come to Russia on the invitation of the government—and they had not even sent a porter to meet her! *Incroyable!* A fine start! The sympathetic young courier was also surprised and offered to take them in the only car that awaited outside the station. It was there to take him to the Foreign Office with his dispatch case. At the office he would be able to find out what arrangements had been made for them.

At the Foreign Office, which was then housed in the once de luxe Hotel Metropole, the car waited while the courier went inside with his diplomatic valises. Soon an immaculately dressed gentleman came out, kissed Isadora's hand and asked: "Don't you remember me?" She recalled having met him in 1918 in America with the Baron Ungern-Sternberg. He had then been known as *Count Florinsky*, so their first meeting with a Bolshevik in the very heart of Moscow was with a diplomatic Count!

With old-world courtesy he invited them to his room at the nearby Savoy Hotel where after skillfully making an omelet, served with buttered rolls and unsweetened tea, he saw about temporary accommodations for them. He was only able to get one room in which, with a large bed and couch, they had to make themselves as comfortable as the circumstances and a plague of flies would permit. There were also other members of the insect world which made their attempts at rest abortive. Later Jeanne, the maid, was hysterically horrified to see an enormous rat walk slowly across the room sniffing at the crumbs fallen from the white bread which the young courier had brought them.

Recalling that the train with their heavy baggage would still be standing on the sidings at the station, the young courier suggested that they spend the next night there until some sort of order was made of their chaotic state. Lunacharsky would certainly be back at his desk on Monday morning. There he would find the notification of the arrival of the government's guests and surely proceed with all possible dispatch to welcome them and get them settled. This he did, sending his secretary to deputize for him and accompany the three women to the apartment which had been arranged for them.

Having presented Lunacharsky's compliments to the dancer, the secretary explained that the Commissar had not quite expected that Duncan would really give up her easy life in the settled capitals of the Western World. No arrangements had been made in the overcrowded city to house her! The present decision was merely makeshift, he explained, but the best they could do for the moment for even so distinguished a guest as Duncan. (While the rest of the world calls the dancer by her first name, the Russians have always, since her first visit in 1905, called her Duncan.) Her type of dancing, even when

done by others having no connection with her, is always referred to as "Duncanism."

Given the housing situation, the Commissar of Education had hurriedly arranged for Isadora's installation in the empty apartment of the prima ballerina of the Moscow Opera who was then on tour in southern Russia. The commandeering of vacant apartments was quite common in those days. It seems rather ironic that the great dancer should be housed in the home of one of the leaders of the ballet—which she expected was to be swept away after her arrival and the foundation of her school under the government. She laughingly made the best of the situation.

When she was installed in the *biblot* and bric-a-brac crammed place, her first visitor was Constantin Stanislavsky, her old friend of the Moscow Art Theatre. She was heartily glad to see the distinguished actor-manager, but like all artists who were not politicians, he had suffered much during the revolutionary days. He had grown much older since she had first met him in 1908, but his beautifully expressive face still retained all its former charm. He spoke to the dancer of Gordon Craig and other mutual friends and craved news of the theatre in the outside world.

He told her of the new work he was doing which he hoped he would be able to take out to show to Europe and America. He dwelt again on the terrible times he and his confreres had gone through. Isadora, out of her emotional and momentary enthusiasm for the new state was moved to tell him: "*Cher, grand artiste*: you are faced with this dilemma; either you must consider your career at an end and commit suicide, or you must begin a new life by becoming a communist!"

A few nights later he called to take Isadora and Irma to see one of his new experiments—the staging of Tchaikovsky's opera, *Eugene Onegin*. He was most anxious to hear what the great one thought of it. But Isadora did not like it at all. She had never been interested in opera as an art form. Had she not once, with great temerity, said so to Cosima Wagner? "Music drama is nonsense. . . . One must speak, then sing, then dance. Speaking is the brain, the thinking man. Singing is the emotion. Dancing is the Dionysian ecstasy which carries all away. It is impossible to mix them in any way, one with the other. Music drama is impossible!"

This she repeated to Stanislavsky in substance and added that *Eugene Onegin*, in any case, wasn't worth bothering about! In such stirring times it was too sentimentally romantic to be treated in his realistic manner. "You must do bigger things than that, Stanislavsky. The *Bacchae* of Euripides, for instance. I have always dreamed of your directing this tragedy with Eleonora Duse playing the role of Agave while I, with my pupils, danced the choruses!"

Another of her immediate visitors was Florinsky, who came one evening to invite her to a party. Most of the Party leaders would be present and she would have an opportunity to meet them. She was naturally thrilled with the idea of meeting the men who had fought the Revolution. She imagined in her naive way, as she afterwards explained, that she would see a group of shining-faced idealists dressed like so many Tolstoys. For this auspicious occasion she donned a red dress, draped her scarlet *Marseillaise* shawl about her, and bound around her head a turban made with a red tulle scarf.

The party was being given at the Karakhan mansion which was once the home of the "Sugar King" of Russia. Its remaining interior decoration reflected that worthy millionaire's taste. Into the *grand salon*, lavishly decorated in the Louis XIV style, Isadora and her escort were shown. Around a large table in the center of the room sat the solemn, well-dressed comrades. With varying degrees of interest they were listening to a lady standing by the curlycued, rosewood piano warbling a French *Bergerette*:

Jeune filette  
Profitez du temps,  
Les Violettes  
Se cuille en printemps;  
La, la, la, la, la, la, la etc.

Scarcely believing her ears or her eyes that took in the singer in evening dress and the overdecorated *salon*, the gaze of the astonished visitor finally rested upon the assembled "comrades." They were like any other group of well-to-do, middle-class people in any other part of the world. The entertainer having finished her *Bergerette* was about to do a *Chanson Galante* when the outraged dancer suddenly cried out: "What do you mean by throwing out the bourgeoisie only to take their places and indulge in the same ridiculous antics as *they*

used to do here in this very room. Here you are, all sitting as *they* used to do in this place full of bad art and furnishings of *mauvais goût*, listening to the same insipid music that *they* used to listen to. Nothing is changed. You have merely taken their places. You made a revolution. You ought to be the first to clear away this awful inheritance from the bourgeoisie. You are no revolutionists. You are bourgeois in disguise. Usurpers!"

Leaving her hosts speechless at this outburst, the flame-clad, fiery-tongued guest stalked from the room, followed by her astonished escort. The episode was much talked about in Communist circles and probably called Lunacharsky's attention to the fact that the dancer still had to be seen. A few days afterwards he made a tardy official call at the Geltzer home to greet the guests with whom he had corresponded and whom he had installed there. He, as a well-known author and playwright, had much to say to Isadora and much to ask her about. The substance of his interview with the dancer—about her life and art and her future in the new state—was published shortly afterwards under the title of "Our Guest":

When Duncan announced her intention of coming to Russia, shrieks of astonishment and indignation were heard. At first the newspapers denied the rumors and then ascribed it to her craziness.

Leonid Krasin told me that Duncan had been afraid of her farewell performance in London. The papers had already begun to stir up enmity on account of her "Bolshevism." Meanwhile, the tickets for her concert were selling out. The audience gave her a great ovation, which was also a tribute to her courage in undertaking the voyage to Russia. . . .

What end did she have in coming to Russia? The main end was an educational one. She came to Russia . . . to organize in this country a big school of a new type. . . . Duncan believed with all her soul that in spite of the famine and the lack of necessities; in spite of the backwardness of the masses; in spite of the terrible seriousness of the moment and the consequent preoccupation of the government officials with other vital questions, a beginning of her idea could be made. . . . Her vision reaches far. She is thinking of a large government school with a thousand children. She is willing for the moment to begin with a smaller number. . . .

At present Duncan is going through a phase of rather militant communism that sometimes, involuntarily, makes us smile. [Here Lunacharsky tells the story of Isadora's remark to her friend Stanislavsky.] In another instance Duncan was asked by some of our communist comrades to a small, one might say, family fête. She found it possible to call their at-



tention to their bad communistic taste, because of the bourgeois surroundings, and their behavior, which was far from the flaming ideal she had painted in her imagination. . . .

The People's Commissariat of Education greets Russia's guest and believes that, on the occasion of her first public appearance, the proletariat will confirm the greeting. Duncan has been called the Queen of Movement, but of all her movements, this last one—her coming to Red Russia in spite of being scared off—is the most beautiful and calls for the greatest applause.

## Chapter II



AS THE HOT AUGUST DAYS FOLLOWED ONE ANOTHER WITHOUT ANY progress being made in the matter of the school, Isadora began to grow impatient. She wondered if she had come to Russia on "a sleeveless errand," as she expressed it. The forced inaction and the seeming lack of interest in her project by the hierarchy annoyed her. To while away the hours, she walked about the city in the daytime and attended the theatres in the evening. In those days admission was free and she was always a welcome guest.

Lunacharsky at one point showed some interest by sending his secretary and the President of the Far Eastern Republic to take the dancer to see a children's colony at Malakofka, outside the capital. Having been shown over the house and grounds, Isadora gathered the children about her on the front lawn and gave them a lesson. They, not to be outdone in rhythmic courtesy, danced some of their peasant dances for her. Then through an interpreter she spoke to them, saying: "These are the dances of slaves you have danced. All the movements go down to earth. You must learn to dance the dance of Free People. You must hold your heads high and throw out your arms, wide, as though you would embrace the whole universe in a great fraternal gesture!"

Another day she was taken for a sail up the river to Varabiovy Gory—Sparrow Hills—now called Lenin Hills. It was from this

elevated spot that Napoleon first gazed on Moscow in 1812. On this day the dancer met Comrade Podvowsky who had in the first moments of the Revolution helped organize the Red Army. He was the People's Commissar for Physical Education and was engaged with a small army of athletes in the construction of a sports stadium, now one of the features of the countryside.

Highly impressed by this "God-like man" as she later called him, the dancer talked at length with him and exchanged views on the training of the Russian youth. When she returned to Moscow she sat down and wrote an impression of her new acquaintance, and when she had finished this pen portrait she sent it off to an English editor. It was printed and later she was quite thrilled to receive a check in payment for it. This she proudly kept for a long time until forced to cash it to buy food for the children of her school.

Later she wrote a brief article in French for the Paris newspapers which finally appeared in *Humanité* minus any financial recompense. The article was headed with a quotation from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*:

*I love the man who creates higher than himself  
and perishes in this way.*

You await my impressions of Moscow. I cannot, after the manner of H. G. Wells and other writers who have been here, give you political impressions. I know nothing about politics. I can only give you my impressions as an artiste, and these impressions are more felt than reasoned.

In each human being, and above all in children and artists, there exists a sixth sense which enables us to divine the psychology of a soul, or a group of men, or a town. It is this sixth sense which has dictated all my artistic career. It was in listening to this voice that I left Europe, where Art has been crushed by commercialism. And it is by this sixth sense that I divine Moscow. For one cannot judge what has happened here in looking about one at the material things. It is with clairvoyant eyes that one must look. For all that is on the surface here is only momentary, and the truth is deeply hidden in the interior of the soul of the country. It is to that great collective soul that the miracle offers itself.

I am convinced that here in Russia is the greatest miracle that has happened to humanity for two thousand years.

We are too close to it to understand, and it is probably only those who will be alive in a hundred years who will understand that by the reign of communism humanity has made a great step forward from which it can never go back.

. . . . .

The spiritual truth of that which passes here I see as a shining vision of the future. The prophesies of Beethoven, of Nietzsche, of Walt Whitman are being realized. All men will be brothers, carried away by the great wave of liberation that has just been born in Russia.

This is the message that my soul received, given to me by the prophetic voices which arise out of Communist Russia.

This is the message I would like to send you.

Isadora Duncan.

This idealistic message was followed by a period of living out in the woods of Sparrow Hills. Mrs. Podvowsky had found a hut for Isadora and Irma. It was a two-room log cabin furnished in the most primitive fashion; in fact there were neither beds nor any sort of sanitary arrangements. The food was rough and had to be cooked on a single-burner primus stove. Milk, when it could be had, was goat's milk. After a week of this pioneering existence the dancer was ready to move back to the ballerina's *bibilot*-stuffed apartment, but this soon proved to be unnecessary, for in the meantime the authorities had been able to find a place large enough for the installation of the proposed school.

The building which the Commissariat of Education had tardily found was a private house on the once-fashionable Pretchinstenko Street. It had been the property of Ushkoff, a wealthy tea plantation owner who was also the husband of Balachova, one of the leading members of the Moscow Opera Ballet. It amused Isadora to go from the apartment of one prima ballerina to the mansion of another. It was some sort of progress, she wryly said!

She also recalled that when she had decided to leave Paris for Russia she was anxious to rent her house in Passy. Various people called to see it. Among them was a Russian lady who had just arrived in the French capital from Moscow and was anxious to settle down. When she was shown over the place with its large studio-theatre, she decided not to rent it. There was no real *salle à manger*.

Later Isadora heard that "the-Russian-lady-who-wanted-a-dining-room," was the well-known Moscow ballerina, Balachova. Now here she was in Balachova's house in Moscow!

Or at least in part of it, for when the ballerina had fled from Moscow the authorities had placed seals upon the doors of two of the chief rooms, the bedroom and the boudoir. These had been the only two rooms left to the owners when the place was confiscated

after the Revolution. All the many other rooms, the courtyard, stables and carriage houses, etc. had already been turned over to as many homeless families as could be crowded into them. From the two sealed rooms the *objets d'art* had been first removed, as were also the enormous mahogany beds and the best of the miscellaneous furnishings. These, it was said, had been taken by Bela Kun for his own private apartment.

The whole house—even when seen denuded of movable things save the grand piano, the massive oak pieces of the dining room, the almost immovable settees and sofas and such other very heavy objects—gave a picture of the opulent bad taste of a rich bourgeois interior. All the ceilings were painted and stuccoed and each room was decorated in a different style. The entrance hall had marble columns and heavy marble benches whose backs were carved with bas-reliefs of nymphs and satyrs.

The two rooms primarily destined for Isadora and Irma were destitute of beds and ordinary furnishings. The most important thing in Irma's room—formerly the boudoir—was an enormous Saxe china chandelier suspended from the flower-painted ceiling which also had much gilded stucco work and Watteau-like medallions. In Isadora's room—formerly the master bedroom—was a huge canopy crowned by a Napoleonic eagle. Under this had once stood the great mahogany bed, but now there was only a camp bed, sadly insignificant in the immensities of the empty room. The great mahogany doors were also embossed with brassy Napoleonic eagles, ciphers and medallions of the French emperor and his consort, Josephine.

With some silken varicolored scarves, the Empire candelabra were hidden, the forlorn, eagle-crowned canopy was removed, rugs were scattered about the floor and on the divans, and—as it grew colder—a great brick stove, Russian style, was built in. The room was made less brutally stylistic and more habitable. And one by one the squatters were evicted from the various rooms: the Chinese Room, the Japanese Room, the Empire Room, the depressing, oak-panelled German Gothic dining room, and the Turkish Room which led into a Winter Garden walled with leprous rocks from which sprang or dangled mangy cacti and withering ivy. With these rooms ready to receive them, Isadora began to clamor for children with whom to start the school.

She asked for children and the authorities sent to the school a collection of adults. Like the animals going into Noah's Ark, they came in pairs: two porters, two maids, two typists, two chefs. The last two proceeded to the kitchen, where they found not a casserole or a kettle in the place! After the necessary kitchen implements were obtained, including the inevitable samovar, it was discovered that there was nothing to cook in them!

All the inhabitants of Moscow were on rations. Artists were entitled to the ration for brain-workers—the *Payok rabotnikov umstvenova truda*, which consisted of white flour, pressed caviar, tea and sugar—which once a fortnight Jeanne would go to collect. And once a fortnight, Isadora would give, with her usual inconscient and gay generosity, a party for the half-starved artists and poets who had begun to flock to the studio. For meals on the other days, when the supply of flour had been exhausted in the making of the party pancakes, the chefs would exercise their culinary skill in dishing up the eternal potatoes in various appetizing ways.

After she had been somewhat settled in her new home Leonid Krasin came to call. Following dinner in the studio, whose oak-panelling was now hidden behind the dancer's blue draperies, she entertained her distinguished guest. A young violinist played the Schubert *Ave Maria* to which the dancer performed a poem of maternity. This dance, one of her most lovely creations, was in a sense the rhythmic dedication of the Moscow Isadora Duncan School.

With the subsequent arrival of Pierre Luboschitz (a young pianist who afterwards made a name for himself outside Russia), Isadora and Irma were able to pass some of their waiting hours practicing old dances and creating new ones. During this period two new dances to music by Scriabin were composed. Into these two *Études* by the Russian composer, the dancer compressed all the horror of the famine which was then stalking the greater part of the country.

## Chapter III



BY THE MIDDLE OF OCTOBER—THREE MONTHS AFTER SHE HAD HOPEFULLY sailed from London—the door of the mansion was opened to let in the children for the new school. Of the hundreds who came, only fifty of the most talented were accepted. From that time until the third of December, when the school was formally opened, these children came daily to receive their first lessons.

A well-known Russian artist, George Annenkov, was present at the first lesson. In a book published some time ago in France, he writes of it:

In a room whose walls and doors were hidden behind abundant gray [blue] draperies and where the steps were softened by a thick carpet, her pupils awaited her. Little girls of the Moscow working class: intimidated bambinos with pigtails or close-cut hair, with freckled faces, with fearful astonishment in their eyes, with worn-out dresses.

Dressed in a light blue Ionian peplum, Isadora opened her arms as though to say: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden!" Her head was inclined to one shoulder, her transparent smile was lit with a maternal tenderness. With a sweet voice (the unforgettable voice!) she spoke in English:

"Children of Humanity's New Era, I am happy and proud to come to you. But I have no intention of teaching you dances free. You will dance when you will, the dances which your happiness will inspire, my dears! I only wish quite simply to teach you to fly like the birds, to sway like the saplings before the wind, to frisk about as playfully as butterflies do on

a May morning, or a tree frog in the dew; to breathe as carelessly as the clouds, to leap as silently and effortlessly as a gray cat. Translate!" she said to the interpreter and political instructor of the school. (The pupils of Duncan were from six to twelve years old.)

"Kids," translated the political instructor, "Comrade Isadora has no intention of teaching you to dance, for these leapings belong to the rotten West. Comrade Isadora will teach you to wave your arms like the birds, to rub against each other like cats, to leap like frogs. In a word to imitate the gesticulation of animals. There you are, Comrade Isadora!"

"It seems to me that the comrade's translation is somewhat shortened!"

The Soviet language is a little more laconic than English, Annenkov explained. Yet in spite of inadequate translation, an unheated studio, the uninterested and even insulting members of the orchestra with whom they later rehearsed, the children were taught day by day to move with a juvenile grace and harmony which rivaled that of the band of youngsters who first inhabited the villa at Gr  newald. They could not help but love this teacher who was so maternal and whose very walk across the room was in itself a beautiful dance. And they were spurred on by the notion that they might be chosen to appear with their teacher at the fourth anniversary celebration of the Revolution in the Bolshoi Theatre.

For this gala which was to be given on November 7th, Isadora was asked by Lunacharsky to dance. He wished her to be the only one on the programme. It was, he said, really a great honor and a tribute to her greatness in coming to Russia in the face of so much calumny and opposition. She told the friendly Commissar that she would indeed be proud to make her first public appearance in Soviet Russia under such conditions. All the seats, she was assured, would be free, the tickets being distributed to the workers' organizations and the Red Army.

The dancer decided to perform her Tchaikovsky numbers; and as a special homage to her audience she composed a dance to the official anthem of the new regime, the French revolutionary song *L'Internationale*. Upon hearing what the programme was to be, however, the organizers were a little nervous. The idea of the *Marche Slav* upset them. They all knew that several bars of the ancient Czarist hymn, *God Protect the Czar*, were woven into the musical fabric of the Tchaikovsky composition. This might be enough to send out an emotional spark that would kindle a flaming counter-



revolutionary demonstration, even in a hand-picked audience. Delegated to see if the dancer's creation had anything treasonable about it, Lunacharsky returned to report that Isadora had mimed the tragedy and oppression of the Russian people and their final liberation and that he had been completely overwhelmed by the rare power of her creation.

Although the Bolshoi Theatre holds over three thousand people, ten times that number wanted to see the much-publicized dancer. The newspapers had been filled with reports of the famous artiste who had so courageously left "crumbling, capitalistic Europe" to come and work for the children of the new republic. So while the people she really wished to dance for stood outside in the snow in their thousands, inside the audience consisted of the leaders of the Party, the commissars, government officials, the heads and officials of the trade unions, the leading officers of the Red Army and all the foreign correspondents. Of the distinguished guest's part in the programme perhaps it is best to let the *Isvestia* critic speak:

It is a long time since the Grand Theatre has seen such a *fête d'art*. It was a harmonious *fête* of the freed human body. Isadora Duncan—dancer. But it was not dancing in the ordinary technical sense. It was the most beautiful interpretation in movement and miming of musical chefs d'oeuvres; and also an interpretation of the revolution.

One can differ with the interpretation of certain parts but, even so, to dance this enormous *Symphonie Pathétique*—this symphony of joy, sorrow, life, and death, enthusiasm, and rebirth, of descent into the depths, and victorious uprising—holding the house the whole time in an intense state, is a great triumph.

Especially must be mentioned the *Marche Slav*. . . . By her inimitable plastic and mimic execution of this work, Isadora showed once more what an inspired artiste can make of such an old-fashioned thing. Against the background of the Tchaikovsky music, Duncan depicted in moving gestures a bent, oppressed, heavy-laden, fettered slave who falls exhausted to his knees. Now see what happens to this slave at the first notes of the accursed Czarist hymn. He lifts his weighed-down head, and his face shows an awful grimace of hate. With all his force he straightens himself and breaks his chains. Then he brings from behind his back his crooked and stiffened arms—forward to a new and joyful life. The allegory was understood by everyone. The cortege of the slave on the stage was the *via doloroso* of the oppressed Russian people who break their chains. In Duncan's interpretation, the Czarist hymn sounded, paradoxically enough,

revolutionary. Against the background of this hymn, triumphed the revolution.

The thrill of the evening, however, came for the now completely enraptured audience at the close of the gala. The orchestra began to play the *Internationale* and the whole audience sprang to its feet. Isadora moved to the center of the stage. There, statuesque and draped in her red shawl, she began to mime the overthrow of the old order and the coming of the new: the brotherhood of man. As the audience with one mighty voice sang fervently the words of their hymn, they seemed like a great antique chorus commenting the heroic gestures of the central figure on the stage.

When the dancer had mimed the first stanza, the singing audience saw Irma come from a corner of the bare stage. By hand she led a little child who was followed by another and another—a hundred children in red tunics, each with the right hand held high clasping fraternally the left hand of the one before. They moved against the blue curtains, forming a rhythmic thrilling frieze, then circled the vast stage, and finally surrounded, with youthful arms outstretched towards the noble, undaunted and radiant figure of their triumphant teacher.

Despite the great enthusiasm roused by the appearance of the pupils, Isadora was soon faced with the disintegration of her dream. The Isadora Duncan State School was formally and officially opened. But this fine sounding name and the fine building, with its spacious, unheated rooms, were all she had to show for the great effort she had made in coming to Russia. The economic policy of the government had changed; Lunacharsky himself came to break the news to the idealistic dancer that the government could no longer support the school. Now that the theatres were allowed to charge admission, shops were to be opened, and business allowed to be set up under Lenin's new economic policy, it would be possible for Comrade Duncan to dance before paying audiences and carry on, alone for the time being, the school the government had promised to provide.

Thus, after about six months in Russia, Isadora was faced with two courses: either she could return to her interrupted career in the capitalistic West or she could stay in Moscow and struggle to keep the new school alive with whatever money she herself might be able to earn. Without question she adopted the second course, and before the end of 1921 she was giving paying performances to the thousands who packed the Zimin Theatre—larger than the Grand—on three evenings. With the money obtained from these performances she was able to buy food for the pupils and wood to heat the large house.

For Christmas she bought a fir tree which the children decked. The sight of the pupils dancing in joy about the tree repaid her for having stayed on. Yet her heart bled too, for she could not help but recall the Christmas in 1912 on the Champs-Élysées when there was another celebration at which she delighted her own two children by appearing before them disguised as Santa Claus.

The day following Christmas, at the insistence of Ivy Litvinov who begged her to entertain an audience of workers and peasants, she repeated her Tchaikovsky programme. Lunacharsky spoke and important people were present. Although she well knew that such a performance would not feed any of the pupils, Isadora was happy to dance for the free audience. She was also happy and deeply touched by the letter which Mrs. Litvinov sent her the following day.

Dearest, Most Glorious Creature!

Your Slavonic March was something no one can ever forget! Seeing you I lived a hundred years of agony and slavery, but came out into the sunlight at last. But I am still trembling—

I long so much to see you, just for a moment, tonight but my husband went back to work and they told me I might get my *shuba* torn off me if I went out alone in the streets.

Kharakhan, who was also there, stood with the tears running down his cheeks.

I have never even dreamt of such a human, living relation between artist and audience. Now you have really given the Moscow proletariat something for their very own. It was a lovely public—all soldiers and women with handkerchiefs on their heads.

I am thinking, desperately, is there nothing of myself that I can give you? I know you wouldn't refuse. The only thing I can think of is this—I am rather good at decoration. Don't you want me to embroider you something, or make you some curtains, or use me in some way? *Je vous implore!* I can't do fine needlework or the usual sort of embroidery, but I can get you some nice, bold, naive effects—only tell me what you would like! I have made all the curtains for my nursery out of white butter-muslin with *appliqué* animals and birds. Perhaps you would like some for your babies? The effect is very good.

Good-by, my infinitely beautiful one.

Ivy Litvinov

## Chapter IV



SOME TIME BEFORE SHE HAD LEFT LONDON THE PREVIOUS JULY, Isadora had gone with Mary Desti to visit a fashionable fortuneteller who began in the usual manner: "You are going on a long journey to a land with a light blue sky. . . ." But then the spaewife startled her listener: "You will be rich, very rich. I see millions and millions, and even billions, lying about. You will also marry. . . ." At this point the sceptical dancer ungraciously laughed and broke off the séance.

When she arrived in Russia she found that the value of the ruble had so depreciated that the cost of the simplest articles ran into astronomical figures. In these terms she was a billionaire many times over—for all the good it did her. The final part of the incredible prediction, it seemed, was also to come true. Yet, during the first meetings with the person who was to become her only legal husband, none of her intimates would have bet a single ruble on such an outcome. His name was Sergei Essenine.

This young Russian, considered one of the most talented of the post-revolutionary group of writers was of peasant stock, blue-eyed and golden-haired. Poetically and morally he might be said to have something of both Robert Burns and Arthur Rimbaud. As a lad he had tended the horses on his uncle's farm. Having an indefinable spark of genius and being both beautiful and precocious, he had at-

tracted the attention of the priest of his native village in the province of Reizan. Educated first by this priest, he was later sent by him to school. In St. Petersburg, during his scholastic period, he became the disciple of the poet Klouieff, and was presented to the Czarina, who, it was said, took more than a passing interest in the swaggering and handsome peasant. After the revolution, in which he took an active part, he joined the noisy *Imaginisty* group founded in Moscow by the poet and novelist Mariengoff.

In a book called *A Novel Without Lies*, Mariengoff set down a highly colored story of the days passed together by the two poets. He tells of an evening they spent in the summer amusement park in Moscow where the well-known artist and stage decorator for the Kamerny Theatre, George Yacouloff, met them, saying: "Do you want me to introduce you to Isadora Duncan?"

Essenine jumped from his seat. "Where is she? Where?" And taking Yacouloff by the hand: "Take us to her right away!" But in spite of their searches through the large and crowded park, its theatres and restaurants, the poet's feverish desire to see the famous dancer was not fulfilled. It was not until some time later that they were to meet at an evening party in Yacouloff's studio. Mariengoff, who was also there, describes Isadora's entrance and what followed:

She advanced slowly, with grace. She looked round the room with eyes that seemed like saucers of blue delft, and her gaze was stopped by the sight of Essenine. Her mouth, small and delicate, smiled at him. Isadora then reclined on the couch and Essenine came and sat at her feet. She ran her fingers through his curly hair and said: "*Solotaia golova* [golden head]!"

We were surprised to hear her say these two words, she who knew about a dozen Russian words all told. Then she kissed him on the lips, and again from her mouth, small and red like a bullet wound, came with a pleasant, caressing accent, a Russian word: "*Angel* [angel]!"

She kissed him again and said: "*Tchort* [Devil]!" At four o'clock Isadora Duncan and Essenine left. . . .

Into her house the roistering poet came and went. As always, Isadora was surrounded with a mixed crowd of Bohemians—poets, artists, musicians, etc. These were leavened by a sprinkling of Americans, mostly journalists like Bessie Beatty, Ernestine Evans, Walter Duranty, and a few members of the American Relief Association, visiting Moscow from their labors in the famine area. The Russians

thought the poet was a genius, as Isadora also did. The Americans, on the other hand, thought that he was merely a talented hooligan. Walter Duranty has called him "a pimply-faced, extremely worthless poet" and "offensive." Later he did come to agree with the dancer—"I admired her terribly and thought her conversation wonderful"—in the Bohemian café called "Stable of Pegasus." There one night Essenine recited one of his poems, "The Black Man," said to have been inspired by the American Negro poet, Claude McKay.

"Line after shattering line," says Duranty, "banged the consciousness of that motley crowd and froze them into horror. . . . When he stopped there was not a sound. Everyone—cabmen, speculators, prostitutes, poets, drunkards—all sat frozen with pale faces, open mouths, and anguished eyes. Then Isadora, whom nothing could dismay, said to me quietly: 'Do you still think my little peasant boy has no genius?'"

For her the young Russian was undoubtedly a genius to whom she was willing to give understanding and love, and from whom she was willing to suffer public humiliation. It was a stormy relationship full of conflicting passions. "He was a wayward, willful, little child, and she was a mother passionately enough in love with him to overlook and forgive all the vulgar curses and the peasant blows," wrote Mariengoff. "And so scenes of love and felicity were usually followed by drunken scenes and trancies. . . ."

As on similar occasions in the past, Isadora was faced with the problem of either divorcing Love from Art or attempting to drive them tandem as best she could. She chose the latter course, and when she was invited to Petrograd to repeat a series of her Moscow performances, she took her lover-poet along. In the former capital they went to the Hôtel d'Angleterre where she, as was her custom, engaged the best suite in the house. (In the bedroom of this suite, a few years later, the unruly poet committed suicide.)

The wine cellar of the famous hotel was still well stocked with all the best pre-revolutionary vintages in uncounted pints, quarts and magnums. This fact was soon discovered by the bibulous poet. He had already also discovered that travelling with an internationally famous artiste gave him a sort of cachet, and he had a free hand about ordering what he wanted when he wanted it. The result was that the dancer often came home from outings or performances to find

him sprawling before a varied collection of empty bottles. More than once during their stay at the Angleterre he had had to be forcibly carried back to the suite by valets who found him wandering about the public halls naked and noisily inebriated.

Yet, in spite of these personal, upsetting conditions, Isadora triumphantly repeated her Tchaikovsky performances with the success she had had in Moscow. There also occurred one performance which made a tremendous impression upon her and one which she most loved to tell later to her friends in France.

This occurred during the second performance which was specially reserved for the sailors of the naval base. Most of the three thousand men packed into the theatre were veterans of the Revolution: sailors from the *Aurora* and the other warships which had led in the Petrograd revolt. After Isadora had danced her first number, the theatre lights went out. The place was suddenly plunged into a darkness which all the flickering matches lit by the sailors could not lighten. There was shuffling of feet, laughter, calls across the audience, and whistling.

Finally, with the audience growing more and more restless, someone backstage managed to find a lantern with a candle in it. This they brought on stage to where the dancer stood, a little nervous as to the outcome of her matinee. Taking the makeshift light, she held it high over her head and walked to the edge of the stage. Then she asked the sailors if they wouldn't like to sing some of their songs for her. Someone translated her request.

A second's silence. Then from out of the great dark cavern before her she heard a solo voice. Rich, vibrant, sure, it sang the opening lines of the old revolutionary song, the *Varshavianka*:

The enemy winds whistle shrill about us,  
Black forces seek to press us down. . . .

The male audience, encouraged by the obscurity and, in any case, used to mass singing, joined in after the leader. The volume of deep tones welled up out of the darkness and poured over the stage where the dancer stood immobile and alone. She who loved music more, perhaps, than all else in the world except her own art, was thrilled to her heart's core; more thrilled, she said later, than she had been upon first hearing Gluck's *Orpheus* or Beethoven's *Seventh Sym-*

*phony*, for this mass music rising from the simple men was a more glorious elemental power and far more moving than any instrumental music.

There on the stage, still holding high the lantern with its flickering candle, Isadora stood with the tears coursing down her cheeks. For the sailors sang in harmony all their revolutionary songs, now grave and rich in full-throated male tones; now martial and quick with invisible banners floating in the air and invisible, soundless feet marching off to some heroic struggle. They sang the endless sorrow-filled stanzas of the *Funeral March for the Heroes of the Revolution*, their unwearied voices rising and falling in the funereal darkness; then the gay peasant ballads they knew so well.

When the light finally came on after an hour of this impromptu concert, Isadora spoke to the sailors, saying simply: "When masses sing it is always beautiful to me. But I have never heard music so rare, so beautiful. I shall never forget what I have heard tonight. Thank you!"

With this special performance and the others behind her, Isadora returned to the school in Moscow which Irma had directed during her absence. As before, the house was open to poets, musicians and others who found in the hostess a generous and lively individual unlike anyone they had known in their restricted town. And, as before, Essenine came and went, vacillating between love and adolescent willfulness.

When a telegram arrived telling of her mother's death in Paris on April 12th, Isadora's world seemed momentarily to collapse about her. She had already had a premonition of this shattering blow as she played with the Ouija the night before. The pointer on which she and the school secretary had placed their finger-tips had dashed and shuttled about the board and finally moved successively to the letters D.O.R.A., her mother's name.

Had it been legally possible she would have flown immediately to Paris. But the American passport with which she had entered Russia, and which had been turned over to a Narkomindel official was nowhere to be found. Also, if she did leave the country, it was her great desire to take Essenine with her. She would have liked, too, to take the cream of her young Russian pupils to show what she had accomplished during her brief stay. In this manner she would be able,



perhaps, to earn enough money to keep the school going, and so she telegraphed Sol Hurok in New York, who answered that he would be happy to arrange a tour for her and her Russian pupils but not before the fall.

Recalling the barbaric hounding of another Russian writer, Maxim Gorky, who had dared to visit America with a female companion who was not his legal wife, Isadora decided that she would have to forego her detestation of the legal ceremony and marry her poet. After all, it was explained to her, the ceremony was the merest formality. Thus it was on the day following the May Day festival, at the Moscow Registry of Civil Statistics that "Isadora Duncan, artiste, and Sergei Alexandrovitch Essenine, littérateur" were married. He gave his age as twenty-seven and she, possessing no legal birth certificate to contradict it, gave hers as thirty-seven and was set down on the type-written certificate as taking the legal name of Isadora Essenine-Duncan.

Then while the excited poet was able to obtain a passport, she had to be content with an official *laissez-passer*. And before embarking on the honeymoon journey that was to take them to the Western World, her friends persuaded her to make out a will. In a penny notebook she wrote the document which took up four of its little pages. She wrote in pencil:

This is my last will and testament. In case of my death I leave my entire properties and effects to my husband Sergei Essenine. In case of our *simultaneous* death then such properties to go to my brother, Augustin Duncan.

Written in clear conscience.

ISADORA ESSENINE-DUNCAN

Witnessed by: I. I. Schneider  
Irma Duncan.

May Ninth, 1922, Moscow.

The following day they took off from the Trotsky Flying Field in a huge Fokker plane. I. I. Schneider told of the final few minutes.

The weather was sharp and cold, he said. There were clouds, and it began to rain. But at the moment of departure the sun shone. On the field were representatives of *Narkomindel* and various foreign journals. Two big trunks were stowed away, and the first private passengers to fly from Moscow to Berlin climbed into the cabin.

Isadora was dressed in a travelling suit which had been specially tailored for the occasion, but Essenine was obliged to put on flying togs lent by the company.

Punctually at nine the propellers turned, and the doors were closed. Isadora looked at the children of her school from the cabin window and waved her hand in farewell to them. The plane glided along the ground. Suddenly the door opened again. A scared, white face appeared with a cry for the lunch basket. Essenine waved his arms wildly. Somebody ran to catch up with them and managed to hand in the basket just as the plane left the ground. After a while it became a small speck in the distance, and they were gone.

## Chapter V



UPON ARRIVING AT THE TEMPLEHOF AIRPORT IN BERLIN ON MAY 11TH, Isadora and her poet-husband went straight to the Adlon Hotel. The various foreign correspondents flocked to interview them for the dancer was always very good copy. They were naturally interested in her new husband, the latest addition to the Russian colony. Since the early days of the Revolution, Berlin had become a veritable Russian salad of nobles—more or less authentic—despoiled merchants, rancorous White guards, adventurers, intellectuals, writers, actors, artists, musicians. Some of this army of displaced persons were engaged in humble and honest labor; others spent their days and nights in pretentious dishonesty.

It did not take Essenine long to find his bearings in this colony which had its Russian publishing houses and newspapers as well as its cabarets and cafés. Soon after his arrival he was not only friendly with Maxim Gorky, who lived there, and with his old friend, the poet Koussikoff, but was also giving public readings of his poems. These were so successful that arrangements were made to bring out a volume of them. Through Isadora he met Franz Hellens, the Belgian poet, who contracted to do a volume of translations into French. This was later published at the dancer's expense by Povolowsky, a Russian publisher in Paris. The volume was titled, appropriately enough it

seemed to many of Isadora's friends, *Les Confessions d'un Voyou* (The Confessions of a Roughneck, or Hooligan).

(What a fine confession this hooligan could have made of a certain day in Berlin. Coming into the hotel room after some Russian celebration, he found his wife weeping over an album which contained portraits of her unforgotten Deirdre and Patrick. Ruthlessly tearing it from her hands, he tossed it in the fire, screaming in a drunken rage as he held her back from attempting to save the precious memorial: "You spend too much time thinking of these . . . . . children!")

A month of the hectic pace in the German capital being too much for the couple, they went down to Wiesbaden. From that fashionable watering place, Essenine wrote on the 21st of June to Schneider, the Secretary of the Duncan School in Moscow:

Dear I. I.:

Greetings to you and kisses. . . . The Berlin atmosphere has shaken me to pieces. At present, after a nervous breakdown, I can hardly move my leg. Now I am taking a cure at Wiesbaden. I have stopped drinking and have begun to work. If Isadora were not so capricious and would make it possible for me to sit quietly somewhere, I could earn a lot of money. So far I have received a 100,000 and something marks, but I have in prospect about 400,000 [inflation marks].

Isadora's business is in an awful state. In Berlin the lawyer sold her house and paid her only 90,000 marks! The same thing may also happen in Paris. Her property—library and furniture—have all been appropriated and carried off in all directions. Her money from the bank has been stopped. . . . But she acts as though nothing has happened, jumps into the automobile to go to Lübeck, or to Leipzig, to Frankfurt, or to Weimar. . . .

Germany? Of this we shall speak later when we meet. But life is not here except with us. Here one really finds the slow, sad descent of which Spengler wrote. Let us be Asiatics. Let us smell evilly. Let us shamelessly scratch our backsides in front of everyone. But we don't stink like corpses, as they stink inside. . . .

About our Russian friends in Berlin I could tell you wonderful things; especially about a denunciation to the French police which made it impossible for me to get to Paris. About all this later, for I must take care of my nerves now. When you are leaving, take all my books from Mariengoff with you and all material that has been written about me during my absence.

I shake your hand, hoping to see you soon.

Your loving Essenine.

To Irma my best regards. Isadora married me for the second time and is now not any more Duncan—Essenine, yes, just Essenine.

From Wiesbaden the couple moved on to Ostend in Belgium and later to Brussels. From the Belgian capital the poet wrote again to tell Schneider: "If you could see me now you would probably not believe your eyes. Almost a month now since I've taken a drink. On account of a heavy neuritis and neurasthenia I made a promise not to drink until October, and now they are over."

From Belgium, through the intervention of her friend Cecile Sorel of the Comédie Française and others influential in governmental circles, the couple were able to proceed to Paris. Then, after a time there, they went on to Venice to stay at the Excelsior Hotel on the fashionable Lido. Towards the end of the season they returned to Paris to prepare for the American tour. This they were to make alone. Word had finally come from Moscow that the group of pupils which Isadora had planned to take with her on exhibition in America would not be allowed to leave.

After arriving in the French capital Isadora went to her house in the rue de la Pompe. There she found that the Russian tenant had fled without paying the rent. Although most annoying, this was also most welcome for it meant that she could use the large Salle Beethoven there for badly needed rehearsals. Since her performances in Petrograd she had not danced in public, and had had no place in which to rehearse for the forthcoming American tour. The poet Hellens who was then at work on his translations of Essenine's poetry saw much of the couple at this period and has given an illuminating insight into their lives at this time:

I saw them almost every day, sometimes in Isadora's little house in the rue de la Pompe or sometimes at the Hotel Crillon, where they had taken refuge from domestic difficulties. If Essenine in the Crillon acted like a man of the world, not a bit out of place in a sphere that was so little made for him, in the intimacy of the little house he seemed more in his element, more striking, more sympathetic. . . .

I do not think there was ever a woman in the world that understood more maternally her role of *inspiratrice* than Isadora did when she took Essenine to Europe, and, in order to get him out of Russia, proposed

marriage to him. This was a sublime act, for it meant for her a sacrifice and the assurance of sorrow. She had no illusions about this, knowing that the period of tormented happiness would be short; that she would live in a dramatic disequilibrium; that sooner or later the wild boy she wanted to bring up would pull himself together and shake off, perhaps brutally, the sort of amorous tutelage which she couldn't stop herself from exercising over him. For Isadora passionately loved the poet. I saw that this love, even at its beginning, was already a sort of despair.

I remember an evening when there appeared to me both the drama of these two existences and the true character of Essenine.

I arrived when they were still at table and found them in a strange and somber mood. They hardly spoke to me. They were clasped together like two young lovers, and there was nothing to show that they had quarrelled. A few moments later Isadora told me that their existence was poisoned by the servants; that there had been repugnant scenes that evening which had quite upset her. As his wife showed herself to me more nervous than usual, seeming to lose the admirable coolness, the sense of measure, the rhythm which was the foundation of her art and also her nature, and which acted so well ordinarily on the poet, Essenine took it into his head to get her drunk. There was no bad intention on his part; quite the contrary. It was his own way of calming shaken nerves. He forced her wheedlingly, softly, lifting the glass himself to his wife's lips. As the effects of the drinking began to show themselves, I read more clearly in the dancer's features the despair which she usually knew how to hide under a calm and smiling air.

Suddenly, Isadora pulled herself together and making an effort, invited us to pass into the studio—an immense hall with a stage at one end and cushioned divans all along the walls. There she begged me to recite my version of *Pougatscheff*, which I had just finished, the lines of which are personages, crowds, the winds, the earth, the trees. I did it much against my will, for I feared to spoil by my defective diction and my timidity, the admirable poem which has an accent both harsh and soft. She could not have been very satisfied with my recitation, for immediately after she asked Essenine to say the same poem in Russian.

How ashamed I was when I saw and heard! What had I done with his poetry? At one moment Essenine let himself go like a whirlwind, at the next he murmured like the morning breezes among the young leaves. It was like an instinctive manifestation of the essential movements of his poetic temperament. Never have I seen poetry lived to such a degree by the poet. The recitation was a powerful résumé of his tastes; he sang them, he proclaimed them, he spat them out, he screamed them, he purred them with an animal grace and a force that gripped and ravished you in turn.

## Chapter VI



AS THE S. S. *Paris* STEAMED SLOWLY PAST THE STATUE OF LIBERTY IN the New York harbor on the first day of October, 1922, Isadora was informed by an immigration official that she would not be allowed to set foot on her native land. Nor would her Russian husband and their secretary, Vladimir Vetluguin, be permitted to land in the country she had told them so much about. There was nothing to be done until this special case had been examined by the higher authorities. In the meantime, the boat having docked at the French Line pier, the detained dancer was able to see her relatives and Sol Hurok, her manager, who were as shocked and mystified as she herself was.

The three detainees were invited to remain on board the *Paris* as the guests of the commandant, Captain Mauras. In this way they were saved the further humiliation of going to Ellis Island. As her visitors left, the manager was singled out by the guards and rudely searched before leaving the pier. To the army of reporters who questioned her, and to one who suggested that perhaps the authorities thought that she and her Russian husband might have come specially to America to spread the dreaded plague of Red propaganda, she retorted:

"Nonsense! We want to tell the American people about the poor starving children in Russia and not about the country's politics. Sergei is not a politician. He is a genius. He is a great poet. . . . It

is only in the field of art that we are working. We believe that the soul of Russia and the soul of America are about to understand each other.

"There is just one thing that astonishes me. That is to hear that the American government has no sympathy with revolutions. I had always been taught that our great country was started by a revolution in which my great-grandfather, General William Duncan, played a noble part."

The newspapers, naturally, had a field day with the news of the dancer's arrival—and with a Russian husband—and their detention by the immigration authorities. Some journalists even accused Isadora and Hurok of having staged the affair so that her American tour might have a good send-off. There were, however, many protesting editorials in the newspapers and many letters to the editors from Americans, indignant and ashamed of the treatment to which the great artist had been subjected in her own country.

This treatment was further compounded the following day when the two passengers were escorted by guards to the Customs Office on the pier. There all their baggage was opened and thoroughly examined by special officers. All wearing apparel was turned inside out and all linings and pockets laboriously examined; even soiled body linen did not escape poking and shaking out. All written matter was microscopically examined; all printed matter, especially in the Russian language—mostly volumes of poetry and copies of Russian classics—was piled together for more detailed examination and possible confiscation. Sheet by sheet all the orchestral and piano scores were turned over and peered at closely. Explanations were demanded and written down of the dancer's marginal notes.

At the conclusion of the leisurely and fruitless search, the party, still accompanied by the guards, were taken in a taxi to the barge office and from there by boat to Ellis Island. Finally they were led before the Board of Review. After a séance in the Enquiry Chamber before the Commissioner of Immigration, Robert E. Todd, Isadora and her two Russian companions reappeared, smiling. To her manager and lawyer who awaited outside she remarked in high good humor: "Pronounced innocent—not guilty!"

The reporters, of course, were also awaiting the outcome and



pressed her with questions as the cutter returned to New York. "I feel as if I were acquitted of murder," she told them. "They seemed to think that a year's residence in Moscow had made me a bloodthirsty criminal ready to throw bombs at the slightest provocation. They asked me silly questions such as: 'Are you a classical dancer?' I told them I didn't know; my dancing is quite personal. They wanted to know what I looked like when I danced! How do I know? I never saw myself dance. The board also asked me if I had spoken with any Austrian officers in Berlin. . . . I had to disappoint them by telling them the truth. I've never spoken to an Austrian officer either in Berlin or elsewhere since my return from Russia. Among other absurd things they wanted to know what Sergei and I thought of the French Revolution!

"Before I set foot on Ellis Island I had absolutely no idea that the human mind could worry itself into figuring out all the questions that were rapidly fired at me today. I have never had anything to do with politics. All my time in Russia has been spent taking care of little orphans and teaching them my art. To say, or even hint, that I am a Bolshevik is Rot! Rot! Rot!"

When the cutter arrived at the Battery the couple were met by a host of old friends and new sympathizers who escorted them to the Hotel Waldorf-Astoria on Fifth Avenue. There while resting from these preliminary incidents before her first public appearance four days later, she was able to read the final word on the grotesque situation, written by the good-humored Heywood Broun: "We have no means of knowing what her political opinions may be and we can imagine nothing of less consequence. She is an artiste of the first rank, who has revolutionized dancing not only in America but all over the world. She deserves a warm welcome from her own country instead of blundering boorishness."

This warm welcome was given to her when she made her first appearance at Carnegie Hall on Saturday evening, October 7th. Three thousand vociferous admirers filled the great auditorium and cheered the dancer. Outside hundreds of others vainly waited for standing room. The programme danced was the familiar Tchaikovsky one with the *Pathétique* and the *Marche Slav*. As preludes to both halves of the programme, the orchestra under the direction of Nathan Franko played several of the earlier pieces of the Russian composer

which he had conducted at the dedication of the same hall in 1891. At the end of the programme the audience stood cheering and seemed loath to leave the hall. The dancer was also reluctant to let them go before giving them one of her inevitable speeches:

Why must I go to Moscow after illusions that don't exist, when you in America also need the dance for your children? I know the American nervous child, for I was one myself.

Soon I hope to show you fifty Russian children dancing Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. I can bring that to life in New York—make it more real than Broadway. . . . Why does not America give me a school? It was the lack of response to this that made me accept the invitation from Moscow.

America has all that Russia has not! Russia has things that America has not. Why will America not reach out a hand to Russia, as I have given my hand?

A second recital was given a few days later. The house was again crowded and enthusiastic. She danced several of her monumental Wagnerian creations, and in response to the insistent applause she danced her favorite Brahms waltz, a sudden vision of her earlier days which brought forth renewed enthusiasm from the audience. As the people still remained cheering she treated them to another speech much like the first of the opening night.

While other New York performances were being arranged—the rush of musical events of the already long-arranged winter season making it difficult to fix last minute engagements—the dancer and her entourage went on to Boston to give two recitals in Symphony Hall. It was mainly because of these two recitals—or rather on the distorted newspaper accounts of them—that the American tour was to be wrecked.

As usual Isadora made a speech to the audience. Carried away by her own eloquence, or perhaps prompted by her Irish demon of perversity, aggravated by the stolidity of the reserved audience and the cold greyness of the famous hall, she cried out:

This is red! [Here she waved her red silk scarf above her defiant head.] So am I! It is the color of life and vigor. You were once wild here. Don't let them tame you!" [Here several old ladies and gentlemen rose from their seats and hurried out of the hall, but students from Harvard and from the various colleges of the surrounding towns remained to cheer.]

Thank God the Boston critics don't like me. If they did I should feel I was hopeless. They like my copies. I give you something from the heart. I bring you something real. . . .

You must read Maxim Gorky. He had said that there are three kinds of people: the black, the grey, the red. The black people are like the former Kaiser or the ex-Czar. People who bring terror, who want to command. The red are those who rejoice in Freedom, in the untrammelled progress of the soul.

The grey people are like these walls, like this hall. Look at these statues overhead. They are not real. Knock them down. They are not statues of real Greek gods. I could hardly dance here. Life is not real here.

As the curtain was hurriedly lowered, the dancer waved her red scarf again while the majority of the audience cheered. Next day the storm broke. All over America in the newspapers appeared headlines:

RED DANCER SHOCKS BOSTON  
ISADORA'S SPEECH DRIVES MANY FROM BOSTON HALL  
DUNCAN IN FLAMING SCARF SAYS SHE'S RED

The stories below the headlines varied in degree from factual reporting to journalistic fantasy. Certain stories pictured the dancer taking off her entire red tunic to wave it about while she made her speech almost nude. One account pithily summed up a particularly violent outburst with "She looked pink, talked red, and acted scarlet."

James Curley, the Mayor of Boston, issued a statement that he had directed the Licensing Bureau that it would be inadvisable to grant Miss Duncan a license to appear in Boston again, "in view of the duty the city owes the decent element. I beg to say that this suspension, after the recent disgraceful performance by the dancer, will continue as long as I am Mayor."

To the reporters who gleefully rushed to see her at the Copley Plaza, before she left for Chicago, Isadora, highly indignant and in fine verbal fettle, said:

If my art is symbolic of any one thing, it is symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England puritanism.

To expose one's body is art; concealment is vulgar. When I dance, my object is to inspire reverence; not to suggest anything vulgar. I do not appeal to the lower instincts of mankind as your half-clad chorus girls do. I would rather dance completely nude than strut in half-clothed suggestiveness as many women do today on the streets of America.

Nudity is truth, it is beauty, it is art. Therefore it can never be vulgar; it can never be immoral.

When I dance I use my body as a musician does his instrument, as a painter uses his palette and brush, and as a poet the images of his mind. It has never dawned on me to swathe myself in hampering garments, to bind my limbs and drape my throat, for am I not striving to fuse soul and body in one unified image of beauty?

Many dancers on the stage today are vulgar because they conceal and do not reveal. They would be much less suggestive if they were nude. Yet they are allowed to perform, because they satisfy the Puritan instinct for concealed lust. That is the disease that infects Boston Puritans. They want to satisfy their baseness without admitting it. They are afraid of the truth. A naked body repels them. A suggestively clothed body delights them. They are afraid to call their moral infirmity by its right name. . . .

By the time Isadora had reached Chicago, the newspaper tempest had reached its height. Reporters crowded into her hotel suite, delighted with the prospect of more snappy paragraphs. They were accompanied by press photographers eager to get the dancer to pose for them, holding aloft the red tunic she supposedly had waved in Symphony Hall. But Isadora had become bored by the hubbub. She told the assembled newsmen that she had not torn off any tunic, nor acted and spoken as the press had reported. But the storm raged on with the ever-vocal hundred-per-centers demanding that the "red dancer" be deported at once. The cry was taken up by the jumping itinerant preacher, Billy Sunday, who was at that period attempting to evangelize the sinners and grafters of the Harding era.

"That Bolshevik hussy," he screamed, "doesn't wear enough clothes to pad a crutch. I'd like to be Secretary of Labor for fifteen minutes. I'd send her back to Russia and to Gorky, that. . . ." As the storm continued, cancellations of the dancer's future engagements poured in. Alarmed for the success of the venture, her manager wired to Isadora pleading with her to make no more speeches. But she was not to be so easily dissuaded from one of the pleasures of her public life. In Chicago the great enthusiasm of her audience prompted her, after two encores, to tell the cheering crowd with her most ingenuous smile:

"My manager tells me that if I make more speeches the tour is dead. Very well, the tour is dead! I will go back to Moscow where there is vodka, music, poetry and dancing." (Pause). "Oh, yes, and

Freedom!" Here the audience applauded loudly. The dancer, encouraged, continued to denounce the authorities and the press and appeal for support for her school. And those who loved her art together with those who were there because they were persuaded that the dancer was on their side of the political fence, applauded her speech as greatly as they had applauded her dances.

After a brief rest in New York she attended a party given by some Jewish poets in honor of their visiting Russian colleague. He turned this friendly honor into a drunken brawl and hurled the particularly offensive anti-Semitic epithet of "Yids" at his hosts. Isadora was therefore happy to go west once more. She had a series of engagements still to fulfill; appearances as yet uncanceled, which began with one in Indianapolis.

Arriving there she found that the impresario was not in the least disturbed by the Boston-to-do, but the mayor of the city, the Honorable Lew Shanks, was quite excitedly on the alert. No red dress was to be taken off and waved seditiously in the faces of *his* townsmen, and four policemen were to be stationed on the stage and in the body of the theatre on the evening of the performance by his order. They were to see to it that the dancer made no obscene gestures, or divested herself of one garment or scarf too many! Why she was allowed even to dance with bare feet and legs still remains a mystery.

In a statement to the press, the highly moral if not too literate mayor said: "Isadora ain't foolin' me any. She talks about art. Huh! I've seen a lot of these twisters and I know as much about art as any man in America, but I never went to see these dances for art's sake. No, sir, I'll bet that ninety per cent of the men who go to see those so-called classical dances just say they think it's artistic to fool their wives. . . . No sir, these nude dancers don't get by me. If she goes pullin' off her clothes and throwin' them in the air, as she is said to have done in Boston, there's going to be somebody to get a ride in the wagon. . . ."

When this pronunciamento was read to her upon her arrival, Isadora remarked: "Disgusting! Disgustingly vulgar! Why it is not even English! Thank God this man Shanks is only Mayor of Indianapolis. . . . Even the savages of darkest Africa would appreciate my work more than some of the natives of the Middle West!" The Indianapolis audience, however, did appreciate her art. The dancer went

through her scheduled programme with marked enthusiasm from the delighted audience who were, however, denied the final vocal fireworks they had expected. She remained demurely silent in spite of the increasing applause, and the services of the four Shanks henchmen were not required.

From Indianapolis the dancer and her pianist, Max Rabinovitch went to Louisville on November 22nd, and continued from there on a brief tour of the larger cities where the bookings had not been cancelled: Kansas City, St. Louis, Memphis, Detroit, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia. The truncated tour ended in Brooklyn at the Academy of Music on Christmas night.

It had been the intention of the dancer to perform in the church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie at the invitation of the liberal rector, Dr. William Norman Guthrie. She also proposed making a speech on "The Moralizing Effect of Dancing on the Human Soul." But before these things happened, Dr. Manning, the then Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York and Dr. Guthrie's superior, stepped in with an announcement to the press:

Bishop Manning wishes to state that the dancer referred to will not speak at St. Mark's Church, nor appear professionally in any connection with the church or its services.

It was amazing, Isadora remarked laughingly, how many *sinless* people there were in America—and always ready to cast the first stone at the poor defenseless sinner.

Her final performances in her native land were given at Carnegie Hall on Saturday evening, January 13th, 1923, and the following Monday evening. At the last she made a brief speech to the crowded house and told them by way of farewell to "dance all the way home," when they left the hall! Then, as January ended—wearied by the press campaign against her; worried by the state of her riotous husband's mental and physical health which numerous unfortunate experiences with the rot-gut, bootleg liquor had done nothing to ameliorate; and penniless to the point of having to borrow their steamship fares from Paris Singer—she sailed away to Europe on the *George Washington*.

To the reporters who came to see her off, she made a final speech:

I really ought not to say a word to you newspaper men. You have succeeded in ruining my tour, on which I hoped so much to earn enough

money to send back to my starving children in Moscow. Instead of taking back money, I have been compelled to borrow money from friends. Your papers have devoted whole columns to printing details about my personal life during my tour: what I ate, what I drank, whom I associated with, but never a word about my art. Materialism is the curse of America. This is the last time you will ever see me in America again. I would rather live in Russia on black bread and vodka than here in the best hotels. You know nothing of Love, Food, or Art.

As to Prohibition, as they call it; no prohibition country for mine. Some of the liquor I drank here would have killed an elephant. It would have killed me if I had stayed on much longer. . . . Had I come to this country as a foreign financier to borrow money, I would have had a great reception. As I came here as a recognized artiste, I was sent to Ellis Island as a dangerous individual. I am not an anarchist or a Bolshevik. My husband and I are revolutionists. All geniuses worthy of the name are. . . .

So good-bye, America! I shall never see you again.

## Chapter VII



ONE OF ISADORA'S FAVORITE MOTTOES WAS—AT LEAST IN HER LATER penurious days—“When in doubt always go to the best hotel.” In keeping with this, upon arrival in Paris with what remained of Singer's loan, she went with Essenine to the de luxe Crillon on the Place de la Concorde. Her house had been let to an American woman for a six month's period and would not be available for another month at least. But all was not “*luxe, calme, et volupté*.” Soon the vodka which Essenine had begun to imbibe with such Slavic gluttony roused all the demons within him. One night, coming back from a party with some of his compatriots, he rushed to his chamber in the elegant hotel and smashed all the mirrors and the woodwork. With difficulty he was mastered by the police, who were called in, and led off to the nearest *poste*.

The American newspapers in Paris seized upon this latest incident of the Duncan-Essenine saga and embellished it with a few fantastic details. Although greatly upset, Isadora came forward loyally to defend her erring husband. As French law gives a person the right to answer any defamatory statement made in the newspapers and demand that it be published on the same page and in the identical type as the original article, she wrote long letters to the editors of the Paris editions of both the *New York Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune*.

After setting them right about what actually happened she ex-



plained that: "The crisis of madness which Essenine was suffering is not due altogether to alcohol, but is partially the result of shell shock during the war; terrible privations and sufferings during the revolution; and also blood poisoning caused by the drinking of Prohibition whiskey in America. . . . Essenine is one of the many victims of America's prohibition laws, from which one can daily read cases of death, blindness, or insanity."

And to close her long letter, the dancer ended with three exclamatory remarks:

*Vive la Vérité!*  
*Vive la sagesse Française!*  
*Et les bons vins de la France!*

Whatever effect the letter had upon the readers of the American newspapers, it had none upon the management of the Crillon. The dancer was politely informed that her presence was not desirable. With her friend, Mary Sturges Desti—now, as the result of one of her innumerable marriages, Mrs. Perch—she moved to the Hôtel du Rhin on the Place Vendôme. From there, with the aid of influential French friends, she was able to effectuate the release of Essenine. Once freed, she decided to take him out of the reach of reporters, and they went off to her favorite hotel in Versailles, the Trianon Palace. Soon it was decided to pack Essenine back to Russia rather than have him again fall foul of the French police, who did not seem to think much of the turbulent Russian either as a poet or citizen. The faithful Jeanne, who spoke a Russian of sorts, was delegated to accompany the poet as far as Berlin.

After the departure of the poet Isadora finally got back into her rue de la Pompe house. There she was able to make use of the large studio, and she began to look forward to the future possibility of giving some performances. Finding an impresario at that late date in the Paris season was an impossibility. Although having little time to work in and less professional skill, the dancer's brother and her temporary secretary managed to arrange two dates at the vast Trocadéro, but without good organization the magic name of Isadora was seemingly no longer sufficient to pack the great arena. The two performances, while they brought forth, at Isadora's impassioned pleading, money for the starving Russian children, provided very little surplus cash for the dancer's own immediate needs.

The witty Parisian chronicler, Michel George-Michel, writing of the first soirée at the Trocadéro, told his readers: "Our genial and nevertheless charming Isadora, following her habit, has just delivered an astonishing discourse after her evening of dance at the Trocadéro." He went on to describe how the bills had rained down upon the wide stage in answer to the dancer's plea—ending the report with his version of Rappoport's threat to get up on the stage and dance if she continued to speak.

Another friend tells of this period when the still gay dancer was harassed by lack of funds. Essenine had come back from Berlin, seemingly unwilling to return to Russia without his wife, and was then posing for his portrait in the studio of his compatriot, Boris Grigorieff. For the moment all seemed calm and happy in the rue de la Pompe, except that the cook was owed back wages. When friends arrived for dinner it was explained that there would be only potluck, for the cook had been providing, out of her own means, all that had been eaten during the past week. As the table was being laid with the rumpled and soiled tablecloth, the doorbell rang and Isadora disappeared, asking to be excused by her guests.

Half an hour later she reappeared with her arms full of packages. She was followed by her secretary also bearing flowers and bottles and other packages. The table was reset with a beautiful checkered cloth and napkins. Carnations were set in a vase on the table, and up from the kitchen came the *bouillon* which had been made to start the original meal.

The other packages were untied and placed on plates—An enormous lobster, two large devilled crabs, salad and early strawberries. There also appeared, through the good cook's generosity, the sad-looking piece of boiled beef and vegetables which had provided the *bouillon*. To accompany all this were four bottles of *champagne nature* which, as the hostess laughingly explained, costs so very much less than vintage wine and tastes just as good!

The explanation of the suddenly embellished feast was told as the meal progressed. Isadora, always in her element as a hostess, explained that her secretary had been out all afternoon trying to extract from one of her many debtors, some of the money owed. With the meager sum he had managed to obtain, she said, she had taken a taxi and gone shopping. Only the fact that she was left with but a few francs

to pay for the fare home prevented her, she explained sadly, from buying a whole roast duck or a Strasbourg *pâté de foie gras*.

To her brother, who in the meantime had come in with one of his female disciples, and was regarding the laughing feasters with puritanical disapproval, Isadora offered the claw of the lobster.

"I don't eat meat," he said shortly.

"But this isn't meat, Raymond. This is fruit. *Fruiti di mare! Fruiti di mare!*" she repeated, and laughed to see the grim look on her vegetarian brother's face.

At another party in the rue de la Pompe—a small reception given by the dancer for a group of artists and poets—her husband made another awful scene which caused the Parisian police to take a hand again in subduing him. It was evident, as in the party of the Yiddish poets in New York, that Essenine did not relish being slighted in favor of his wife, whom her friends considered the greater genius. Like a spoiled child he left and went upstairs to his room. Later, as someone was playing a Beethoven sonata, he rushed into the studio shouting in Russian: "Band of bloated fish; mangy sleigh rugs; bellies of carrion; grub for soldiers; you awoke me!" And seizing a candelabrum he swung it at a mirror which crashed to the floor. Several of the male guests tried to master the kicking, vehement *moujik* while one of the frightened servants telephoned to the nearest of the police stations. Soon four policemen arrived and Essenine was borne off, affably saying: "*Bon politzie! Aller avec vous!*"

Next morning, Isadora, on the advice of her friends, made arrangements to have her husband transported to a *maison de santé* (a private hospital). Later she was accused by the poet's friends of having had him committed to a common asylum, but considering that the hospital was an extremely expensive one on the outskirts of Paris—Pierre Louÿs was only one of the distinguished patients at the time—the charge was both absurd and untrue. Under all the difficult circumstances of her relations with the wild and willful poet, the dancer continually showed great loyalty, much forbearance, and magnanimous love.

Through all this the newspapers continued to play up the slightest incidents of her private life which they felt might titillate their readers. A particularly scurrilous article was from the pen of the White Russian author, Merezhkovsky, then living in exile in Paris. The Parisian

daily *L'Éclair*, which published the venomous piece, received a stinging answer from the dancer, detailing the palpable untruths of the old novelist.

After the second performance at the Trocadéro, which was less of a success than the first, Isadora's thoughts turned again towards Russia. She sold off the furnishings of her house and rented it on a long lease to a dubious Russian character. The furniture was sold with slight consideration for its artistic or intrinsic value. The books in the library, many of which she had owned since first leaving America, were piled up in the attic to await a happier and more tranquil day. Sold also—and this to pay the bill of a tailor who had, before the American trip, made some suits for the poet—were the robes and suits which the dancer's friend Paul Poiret had specially designed for her to wear in Russia. And so from the sad, empty house on the rue de la Pompe she fled back to Moscow by way of Berlin.

## Chapter VIII



ON AUGUST 5TH, 1923, ISADORA AND HER HUSBAND ARRIVED BACK IN Moscow after an absence of about fifteen months. As she descended from the train her friends thought she looked harassed and worried, although in reality she was glad that she was "home" and had brought back her poet to the place where he belonged. The object of her maternal care stumbled from the coach, inebriated with the constant streams of vodka imbibed since the train had crossed the frontier. In his roistering joy he had smashed all the windows of the compartment.

Accompanied by a bewildering array of wardrobe trunks, suitcases, leather bags and other paraphernalia, mostly belonging to the poet, the party drove to the school. At that moment it was deserted, and the children were all at a summer home in the country. Isadora, longing to see them, hired a car after lunch and drove out from Moscow with the now sobered Essenine. But they merely remained overnight among the happy pupils. The poet was anxious to get back to his friends and relate to them his adventures. He remained absent for days.

After waiting and worrying each day about what had happened, Isadora finally decided that perhaps the end had at last come to this hectic relationship. She decided to flee to the Caucasus and attempt to get some rest during what remained of the summer season. Her

mind relieved by this decision, she began to repack her valises. In this she was aided by the faithful Irma—the maid Jeanne having been left in Paris. As Irma laid out the clothes for the trip, she discovered with amazement the poverty of the dancer's personal lingerie. As for the dress trunks, they were practically bare. When questioned Isadora ruefully smiled and told her:

"No, I haven't a thing. All the new things I used to buy in New York and Paris would disappear shortly after I'd bought them. At first I thought it was Jeanne. Then one day by chance I discovered that a new black Fortuny gown was in one of Essenine's wardrobe trunks. It seemed, too, that all my lingerie evaporated from the drawers of the dresser. As for my money. . . ."

"In that case," said the realistic Irma, "we must open the trunks and remove your belongings."

"Oh, we mustn't do that!" cried Isadora with a tragic, frightened look. "He has a mania about people touching his trunks. He has even threatened more than once to shoot me if I dare look in them. . . ."

A key was found to open the largest of the new suitcases. A bolt of silk fell from it, and with this material Irma later proceeded to cut patterns for nightgowns for the dancer while another friend went off to hunt for a locksmith. Besides the silk, the valise contained a veritable arsenal for a travelling salesman in barbershop supplies: boxes and loose cakes of expensive soap, bottles of lotions, bay rum, brilliantines, tubes of shaving soap and toothpaste, innumerable bottles of perfume, packages of safety-razor blades. All, doubtless, gifts which would later *épater* the poet's family and friends. One of these, Mariengoff, tells how Essenine upon his return threw about handfuls of valuable notes in cabarets and restaurants. It may be assumed, therefore, that one of the other trunks probably held a stock of dollar bills and other monies cunningly filched from the unwitting dancer in America and France.

The actual contents of the other trunks and bags will never be known. Just as the locksmith was about to try his skill on the fancy locks, the owner of the trunks burst into the room. Pushing the welcoming Isadora away from him, he shouted madly: "My trunks! Who's been meddling with my trunks? I'll kill the person who touches my trunks. . . ."

He quieted down when it was explained that they were merely going to move them, thinking he wasn't coming back. Then he took an elegant leather key-wallet from his pocket and proceeded to open the large wardrobe trunk. While he was engrossed in finding what he wanted to take out, Isadora snatched at something she saw there, crying in mock astonishment: "Look! Isadora's dress!" He tried to pull it from her and a childish tug-of-war began between them until she threw the dress to Irma. Then she ran to the open trunk and pulled out something else. Again the childish tugging, he crying the while: "It's mine! It's for my sister. You gave it to me in Paris. . . ."

"No! No!" cried Isadora. "This is for Irma. Poor Irma! No present from Paris!"

Feeling bested by the two women, he let go his end of the disputed dress and rushed to close the trunk before anything else could be taken from his loot. He then made a little parcel, as of old, with a clean shirt and toilet articles. Before he left, his wife told him sternly in her broken Russian that if he went off again without telling her where he was going, it was the end. In any case, she was leaving Moscow that night.

That evening, just before the Southern Express pulled out from the Kazansky Station he appeared on the platform sober and smiling. But he could not be persuaded to accompany his wife. They bade each other farewell most tenderly, almost as though it was their first parting, and Isadora continued waving her scarf until he was well out of sight.

After two and a half days of not too comfortable journeying, Isadora and Irma reached their destination—Kislovodsk in the Caucasus, whose Narzan waters are bottled and sold all over Russia. The first person they saw in this far-off place when they left the train was an old friend from New York, Max Eastman, one of whose most beautiful sonnets had been written about Isadora many years before. He was in Kislovodsk, he said, as the guest of Trotsky whose biography he was then writing.

Eastman piloted them about the place, helped them find hotel rooms and entertained them at lunch. Then he disappeared and was seen no more. But the days followed leisurely with the usual round of the watering-place, and after a week or so of this the dancer de-

cided that she should take advantage of the presence of the orchestra, give a performance there and perhaps follow with a tour.

Her first performance would be her familiar Tchaikovsky one which she had given at her first appearance in Moscow. The orchestra which was composed mostly of instrumentalists of the Petrograd Philharmonic knew the *Pathétique* by heart. The *Marche Slav*, however, they had not played since the Revolution and would have to rehearse before the performance.

So the morning of the performance found the orchestra running through the Tchaikovsky march behind the closed curtains of the semicircular bandstand on the Kursaal grounds. As the strident notes of the Czarist hymn rang out in the morning air, early promenaders began to collect in twos and threes. Before the conductor had led his musicians through a third repetition of the piece, he was suddenly faced by an angry official who demanded to know what was meant by the brazen rendition of the Czarist hymn.

The nonplused musician explained to the dreaded official that he was not responsible. He had been ordered by La Duncan to rehearse this piece by the great Russian composer; she was to dance it that same evening at the theatre. To prove that there was nothing in the imagined counter-revolutionary demonstration, he showed the unconvinced official both the programme and the musical score, but he was ordered to stop playing.

That evening the theatre was crowded and the atmosphere electric. The rumor had quickly circulated that La Duncan was going to dance *God Save the Czar*. As she came on the stage the dancer was met by two armed Tcheka men and warned that she could not go on unless the *Marche Slav* was omitted from the programme. She tried to explain that she had danced this same piece before all the Soviet leaders on the Fourth Anniversary of the Revolution and that Comrade Lunacharsky had written most enthusiastically about it.

Then she pushed through the side of the curtains and faced the impatient audience. When the first applause had died away, she asked if anyone in the theatre could interpret her German. A man in the first row stood up and volunteered his aid. The dancer began: "There are members of the police backstage. They came to arrest me! That is if I attempt to dance for you this evening the famous *Marche Slav*



of your great composer Tchaikovsky. But I'm going to dance it even if they jail me afterwards. After all, the prison cannot be much worse than my room at the Grand Hotel!"

The volunteer interpreter who had remained silent until then, said in a loud voice: "You need not worry, Comrade Duncan. You may begin your performance. As President of the Soviet Ispolkom I give you permission to dance the Tchaikovsky march."

The Tcheka men were not at all pleased by the figure they had cut in the affair. While Isadora and Irma were dining at the Kursaal next evening, a frightened messenger rushed in to tell them that the police were in the room of Schneider, the secretary of the school. When the two women rushed to the room they found the two Tcheka men of the night before and another of higher rank, all in full uniform and with revolvers strapped to their belts. When Isadora heard that they had come to arrest the secretary, bedridden because of a sprained ankle, and had not dared touch her, she turned her fury on the high officer.

"*Swolitch!* [Mongrel]" she hurled at him, using one of the most opprobrious Russian words she could remember. "*Swolitch!*" she repeated, as the officer's hand went to his revolver, and she continued to pour forth a torrent of German and Russian epithets. Suddenly remembering Max Eastman and Trotsky she rushed from the room, and with the porter's aid found the direction to the War Minister's villa whose gates were guarded by two Tcheka men. Not allowed to enter, she wrote an explanatory note to which a reply was received after a time. She could return to her hotel, it said, everything would be taken care of.

Following the Tcheka episode in Kislovodsk, Isadora felt that it might be wiser to move on—anything was liable to happen. She decided to go on to Baku, for she had never danced in the famous oil city on the shores of the Caspian Sea and thought it might be worth the train journey of two days and a night. On arrival, she was cheered to find that the German proprietor of the Hôtel d'Europe and his wife had both seen her when she first appeared in Germany over two decades before. She became their most honored guest during her two weeks' stay.

While in Baku she gave several performances with orchestral ac-

companiment. She discovered however—as so many times before—that this was a luxury. Most of the receipts went to pay the musicians, and even the performance she gave free for the oil field workers was accompanied by a large symphony orchestra!

There was no stage in the hall—only an oversized speaker platform. There were no lighting fixtures—only one powerful, harsh white light hanging from the ceiling. There were no stage curtains and no space between the stage and the audience. The orchestra itself was pushed off into a corner of the room to the left of the stage. Yet under such conditions, mindless of the intolerable heat, the nauseating odors, and the complete lack of theatrical equipment, she danced her best for the entranced, open-mouthed workers. During the performance she recalled some lines of Matthew Arnold:

Airs from the Eden of Youth  
Awake and stir in their soul;  
The past returns—they feel  
What they are, alas! what they were.  
They, not Nature, are changed.  
Well I know what they feel!  
Hush, for tears  
Begin to steal into their eyes!  
Hush, for fruit  
Grows from such sorrow as theirs! . . .

The day following this unforgettable performance, the dancer went one better and gave a free matinee for the children of the workers. Before the performance began she called a few of the less shy children and gave them a first lesson in the dance. Then she proceeded to dance some Schubert waltzes and a Chopin *Nocturne*, lyric dances which had added to her fame in the years when she was conquering Germany and France. So delighted was she by the children's reception that she arranged another special gala for them. Through the kindness of her German hosts she obtained the little orchestra from the hotel roof garden, and to their accompaniment she rehearsed with Irma many of the lovely ethereal creations which she had first danced years before. Irma having fallen ill the day of the matinee, Isadora, rather than disappoint the children, decided to do all the youthful dances herself.

With flowers in her auburn hair and in her youthful pink tunic, she danced herself and the children back into the Age of Gold. She was truly, as Witter Bynner had once said of her: "A rosy girl caught in a rain of love." To the music of Gluck, Schubert, Brahms, and Chopin, she danced with an artless joy and grace all her creations of love and adolescent rapture; of ecstasy and happy enchantment. By the magnetic power of her art and the magic of her genius, she caught the fleeting spirit of youth and held it captive for an all too brief moment.

Tiflis, the beautiful capital of Georgia which she already knew from a previous visit during Czarist days, was the next stop on her tour. Here the President of the Caucasian Republic called upon the dancer and took her to lunch. She later gave several performances in the city despite the almost tropical heat, and was inveigled into attending an exhibition by the pupils of a school of interpretative dancing—an experience which filled her with horror as such exhibitions usually did.

Another experience in Tiflis pleased her however. She was taken one day to the camp for homeless Armenian children who were being cared for by the American Near East Relief Association. As she often did before a group of children, she first danced a little dance for them and then, through an interpreter, she gave them a simple lesson in the art of the dance. Before leaving the camp she promised she would send them a collection of little red tunics which the teachers could give to the children who danced the best.

From Tiflis she went on to Batum which lay under the scorching heat of the final days of August. There she was charmed to find that the government—at the suggestion perhaps of the President of the Caucasian Republic—had placed at her disposal a beautiful villa overlooking the Black Sea. Before the Revolution it had been the property of a wealthy Frenchman and had later housed, among others, Leon Trotsky during his stay at the Black Sea port.

Perhaps because it was completely divested of its library and the incidental furnishings which go to make a home of a house, the place depressed the new guest. She fled from it and was later found installed, quite gay and smiling, in the city apartment of a Georgian poet, the brother of the President of Batum Tcheka. He had hap-

pened to be at the theatre on the day she had fled from the villa. Charmed to meet the famous dancer of whom he had read, he took her to lunch and introduced her to a band of his fellow poets. They elected her their "Muse"—she having exercised her full charm upon them—and escorted her to the poet's apartment where they hospitably installed her.

During her stay in Batum she gave many performances and one free matinee for sailors stationed in the harbor. That evening the President of the Georgian Republic gave a banquet in honor of the artist to which were invited the President of the Tcheka, various local commissars, naval officers, and the most important officials of the town. In this large company of men, Isadora and Irma were the only women present! Prompted by that demon of perversity which so often possessed her, when called upon for a speech after innumerable toasts had been drunk, she said with her sweetest smile: "I see that you are all at the banquet tonight. But where are your wives? For you do have wives, do you not? Well, where are they?"

Someone lamely offered the excuse that 'it was summer and they were all in the country. And Isadora noted that the black-eyed Ganymedes present smiled knowingly. . . .

Still, beautiful as the poets were, and attentive and charming to their chosen Muse, they could not help but bring to her mind her own errant poet in Moscow. Since the parting at the Kazansky Station she had written and telegraphed to him with never a reply. So she crossed the Black Sea from Batum to Yalta, hoping that Essenine might find it easier to come there. After a few days, however, she sadly returned to the capital, thinking of the work she would do with the school.

Some time later, after her return, the recalcitrant poet made his appearance. His condition was such and he caused such an uproar that the secretary of the school ejected his erstwhile friend from the place and later wrote him a letter:

Don't you think it is bad taste to scream in Isadora's room in front of people about your love for another woman, and of how you have made two others *enceinte*? Her only fault is that she has been too good for you. You have behaved yourself like a swine. . . . You scream everywhere that Isadora had you put in an insane asylum. I have seen the bill, which

proves that it was simply a first class sanatorium. Do you think an insane asylum would have permitted you to leave any time you wanted? That sanatorium, which cost Isadora a lot of money, saved you from the police and deportation.

On the Place de l'Opéra you hit a French policeman. Had it not been for her influence and protection, you would have sat in prison many months. She protected you everywhere and I have seen the most beautiful articles written by her in your defense. On your account she forfeited her American passport. . . . And you have only repaid her with vile actions. I can see very well what Isadora has done for you, but I do not see what your so-called "love" has done for her.

The poet, now more and more a wreck, made one last visit to the school to reclaim a bust of himself by the well-known sculptor Konienkoff. Pulling the enormous bust from the cabinet where it stood and rolling head over heels on the floor with its weight, he sullenly reeled out of the room, wandering later about Moscow to lose the work of art in some obscure gutter. This tragicomic episode was the last time the saddened dancer saw her unhappy poet and husband.

As for the school, it continued as before, though with fewer pupils than it had started with. The children were always excited when there was a prospect of a public appearance where they would be cheered and encouraged by the audience, and they were then busily rehearsing for such an event. This was to be in November of 1923 when the first *Octobrina Christening* was to take place in the great Bolshoi Theatre. Two famous woman Communists were to speak—Clara Zetkin, the veteran German revolutionist, and Alexandra Kollantai, the elegant novelist and ambassadress.

Feeling that more than words were needed for the historic ceremony, Isadora was invited with her pupils to grace the occasion with her art. She accepted, for the idea pleased her libertarian spirit, but her demon made her decide to dance in this unreligious ceremony to the music of Schubert's *Ave Maria*. In later days when there were many more Soviet composers, a whole musical ceremony might conceivably have been written specially for the occasion.

In spite of its haphazard organization, the ceremony was a great success. Zetkin and Kollantai spoke fervently and at length. To the strains of Schubert's music Isadora led her pupils through a lovely

rendition of divine motherhood to the evident delight of the audience. The only marring feature was the fainting of the septuagenarian Clara Zetkin, and she was quickly revived by a glass of the dancer's champagne.

"It was the lovely Tovarish Duncan who sent you this," said one of the pupils who held the glass from which the weak old lady sipped.

"Ach so! You must thank her for this charged water. It has so refreshed me!"

## Chapter IX



AS 1924 BEGAN, A MUSICIAN NAMED ZINOVIEV CAME TO SEE ISADORA with a plan for arranging a tour through the Ukraine. This idea appealed to the dancer for whom the winter months of inaction had weighed heavily. Having agreed upon terms, Zinoviev went to the region to make the preliminary arrangements. Just as he had mapped out the itinerary and booked theatres, the news of Lenin's death was published and a two week's period of national mourning was decreed. For the moment the tour had to be abandoned.

Although she had never met the dead leader, the dancer was profoundly moved by his death. Accompanied by a friend, she stood in line with the peasants and workers, waiting for hours in the snow outside the Union House, before being allowed to pass into the great hall where the body lay in state. The cold was of such intensity that her companion's ear was frozen and she herself was almost petrified by the long, icy wait. The sight of the grief-stricken hundreds of thousands who filed past the body day and night made a tremendous impression upon her. This she crystallized in the creation of two funeral marches for the dead leader. These were composed to well-known songs: the first to Lenin's favorite revolutionary hymn; the second to the *Funeral Song for the Revolutionary Heroes* which the sailors of the *Aurora* had sung so thrillingly for her in Petrograd.

When the period of mourning ended, Isadora and Zinoviev started

out on the Ukrainian tour. The first performance was given at Kharkov, and there she opened the performance with her two funeral dances for Lenin—their first public performance. Her success was overwhelming and augured well for the future recitals. Indeed, in every town in which she appeared her success was swift and prolonged. In the ancient city of Kiev, which she had already visited during her previous Russian tours, her success was called unprecedented.

In that Ukrainian town of about 500,000, she danced on eighteen consecutive evenings before crowded audiences. On the streets the people hailed and cheered her. Beggars followed her about crying: "Duncan! Duncan, beautiful lady, give us bread!" Like a queen, Isadora regally scattered copper kopecks, one of her superstitious theories being that one must never knowingly incur a beggar's curse.

Each day, therefore, as she went walking or driving through the city, she made sure that her bag carried a sufficient quantity of coins. Once, as the beggars crowded about a restaurant where she was eating, she ordered the waiter to serve them all—the whole whining, ragged army—with plates of *borscht*. After that she was never rid of them, and when she was billed to appear in the town a few months later, she was met by an army of beggars and all their relations who welcomed her at the station with cheers for "Duncan, Duncan, beautiful lady!"

Returning to Moscow in April, she could boast of the enormous success which she had had. It didn't matter much, she said, that there were no great financial results to show for it! Orchestras, which she insisted upon, were really very expensive. Feeling in fine fettle she badgered the school secretary to go north and try to arrange for performances there. Without waiting for results she followed him to Leningrad and took a regal suite in the Hôtel de l'Europe where she had stayed during her previous sojourns and where she had spent her honeymoon with Essenine in 1922.

With her superb unconcern for the cost of things and her usual unrestrained generosity, the dancer entertained all her old and new friends in the grand salon of her suite. Count Aleksei Tolstoi came there with Schelgelov with whom he was collaborating on a play about Czar Nicholas and Rasputin. Arthur Schnabel, the distinguished pianist, and Nicholai Malko, the conductor of the Leningrad Phil-



harmonic, were frequent visitors, as was Klouieff, the poet and master of Essenine. The actors of the Kamerny Theatre of Moscow, then performing in Leningrad, and a host of personalities of the artistic set were always to be found in the salon. No evening passed without either old friends or recent acquaintances sitting down at the dancer's well-garnished table.

During the month of May a concert was arranged with the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra, and a second was booked for the week following. In the interval the impresario managed to arrange a performance in a small provincial town of Witepsk about seven hundred miles from the former capital city. To reach Witepsk, which was off the main line, it was necessary to take a local, odorous train, and Isadora, in an extravagant mood, decided that she could only go by private automobile. With the nobility and dignified grace of a reigning queen going for a ceremonial drive, Isadora stepped into the car. Her pianist and all the mass of baggage were piled in beside her and the antique machine clattered and chugged off to Witepsk. Long, long hours afterwards, without as much as a patch coming loose or a wire becoming undone, they reached their destination. The two performances given there were a great success. The car, as Isadora later told her friends: "*avait un aussi grand succès que moi-même!*"

On the return journey, however, the tragedy happened. Having remained in Witepsk until the last moment, the temperamental dancer urged the driver to speed up the antique machine. After bumping recklessly along for a few miles the car broke in two. The front part with the driver turned somersault, the back half with the passengers was hurled into a ditch. Recounting the incident upon her return to Leningrad, Isadora said:

I was at first in a daze and told myself that this must surely be the end! I have always believed that my end would come in a motor accident. For a while I lay with the most unearthly stillness all about me. Then I felt something struggling beside me and realized that I had come out alive.

No one was hurt; not even the driver, who seemed to have turned somersault. When I finally managed to push all the luggage off my body and struggle out of the ditch, I was concerned not so much about my possible injuries and bruises as about our impossible position. There we were in the middle of uninhabited fields, miles from any place or railway station. I turned on the chauffeur in anger, thinking that his being drunk had caused the accident. But he, poor fellow, was quite sober—maybe

from the shock—and he was not to blame. Terribly bruised and scratched, he sat by the roadside crying like a child over a broken mechanical toy. Over and over again he sobbed out: "My forty *tchervonetz!* Oh, my forty *tchervonetz!*"

For a while we stood helplessly in the middle of the road looking at each other, quite at a loss what to do next. Finally in one hand I took my suitcase from a pile of luggage in the ditch, and with the other I clasped the hand of the still dazed pianist and started off along the road to look for help. We left the broken-hearted chauffeur still sobbing among the debris. When we had walked a few miles, we met a peasant in a rumbling cart, coming towards us. We hailed him . . . and arranged with him to take us, the luggage, and the chauffeur to the nearest railway station, Pakoff. There, all I could do was to send a telegram, since there was no train until midnight. The peasant, with true Russian hospitality, invited us to his *isba*, and we sat with him around the samovar until the train left for Leningrad. . . .

The scheduled concert in that city had to be cancelled and the ticket money returned to the already assembled public that filled the theatre impatiently awaiting the rise of the curtain. A few days later, all bruises and much poorer than she was before, Isadora left Leningrad. Behind her, as a token of her happy stay at the Hôtel de l'Europe, she was forced to leave an unpaid note which seemed, as one of her intimates said, like the war debt of one of the lesser powers.

When she returned to Moscow, it was already June and the children of the school were preparing for their summer holidays. Her lack of financial success in Leningrad forced her to think up some other way of rehabilitating not only her own finances but those of the school. Recalling her earlier profitable tour in the Ukraine, she decided that it might be worth while to take a group of the elder children and Irma and—beginning at Kiev—to visit the lesser Ukrainian towns.

Arrangements were hurriedly made and the first performance was given in the Kiev Grand Theatre. Isadora gave a lecture in German, the children illustrated it by various movements, and the performance ended with a series of concerted dances led by Irma. This mixture of lecture and dance did not appeal to the Kiev concertgoers, for they had already seen Isadora dance more beautifully and youthfully all alone.

Other performances were then tried in the open air with full orchestral accompaniment. In these, the dancer would perform the

first part of the programme alone—usually her monumental Wagnerian compositions—and in the second part Irma with the girls would dance the Brahms and Schubert waltzes. After two weeks in Kiev it was discovered that the financial condition of the school was in no way improved. Most of the money earned went to pay the large expense of the orchestra and the hotel bills of the troupe. Money for fares had to be borrowed from the G.P.U. for the return of the children and Irma to Moscow.

With the children gone, Isadora made arrangements with Zinoviev to continue the tour alone in the hope of making enough money to finance the rest of the year. They planned to take along a concert pianist and tour the Volga district, Turkistan, and the Urals—and, if successful, to perhaps push on to Siberia and China. On paper it seemed an almost perfect arrangement. With the huge expenses of the orchestra eliminated, the feeding and housing of fifteen children no longer an item in the budget, and with the route laid through new cities where doubtless her fame had preceded her, surely some money could be made to replenish her private purse and the school fund.

So while Irma organized classes for the city children in the big sports arena at Sparrow Hills, which the pupils helped to monitor and teach the Duncan exercises and some of the simpler dances, Isadora proceeded on her tour. She was accompanied by Mark Metchick, who was a pupil of Scriabin, and her manager, Zinoviev, and they went from misfortune to calamity. Of this lamentable tour Irma has kept the long series of letters, extracts from which give a rough picture of what touring meant in those far-away districts. The first letter came from Samara in the Volga district, dated June 20th:

Dear Irma:

Where is Saturn? Here is more catastrophe. We can't get from one town to another!!! and the curtains have not arrived. I have given three horrible performances before grey scenery and *white* lights. And we have not a kopeck. We leave this Volga which I prefer to remember from a distance. No public, no comprehension—nothing. Boats frightfully crowded with screaming children and chattering women. Three in a cabin, 2nd class. Every corner taken in first. I sat on deck all night and enjoyed *some* quiet hours of moonlit beauty, quite *alone*. But the rest—nightmare!

We leave tonight for Orenburg. No news of curtains. Telegraph and enquire for them. Then to Tashkent. . . .

This journey is a *Calvaire*. Heat is terrific, almost dead. . . .  
Yours in unholy martyrdom, Poor Isadora.  
Hell of a life, anyway.

The next was sent from Orenburg four days later:

Dear Irma:

We sent you letters and three telegrams without an answer. Just received word that the curtains arrived only today in Kazan!!! Too late to take them to Tashkent. We leave at six tomorrow. Heaven knows for what, but we keep hoping. Have about fifty kopecks in the *caisse*. Please telegraph and write me to Tashkent. One feels so cut off from the world and all these towns are so small, ruined, and God forlorn. I am almost at the last gasp. Dancing in white lights without decors. The public understands nothing at all.

Today I visited the children's colony and gave them a dancing lesson. Their life and enthusiasm is touching—all orphans.

From Samarkand at the end of June came another letter telling Irma:

We go from one catastrophe to another. Arrived in Tashkent without a kopeck. Found theatre full of Geltzer, hotel full of Geltzer, whole town occupied. We had to go to an awful hotel where they demanded "dingy" in advance, and failing, would not even give us a samovar. We wandered round the town *without even a cup of tea* all day. In the evening we went to see Geltzer dance to a packed house!

We arrived here also without a kopeck. The baggage went by mistake to another station. However, here is no Geltzer, it is more hopeful. I dance here Thursday, but it seems, though very beautiful, only a big village. So Heaven knows what will be the result or whether we will be able to leave!!!

The country here is divine, fruits and trees and all like a garden—very hot but lovely. But it's a terrible sensation to *walk* about without a penny. Kiev was a prosperous exploit in comparison. The Tovarish who brings this note saved our lives by giving us his room and sleeping in his private car. So be very nice to him. . . .

There are marvellous things here to buy, but *helas!* The land seems a veritable paradise—for the natives. The whites don't understand how to live here.

Well, we're hoping for better luck. So far the tour is a tragedy. Why did we leave Friday the 13th?

. . . I don't know what is going to happen to us next. At any rate, I've grown very thin. Think of the lovely meals we ate at Kiev!!!

In reply to a letter from Irma detailing the work she and the

pupils were doing in Moscow, Isadora answered from Tashkent on the 10th of July:

Thank you very much for your beautiful letter. I can quite understand how you feel. Blazing sun and prize-fighters are far from my vision of a *Ninth Symphony* to be danced in a golden light of intellectual radiance. But probably you are digging the foundations upon which the future columns will stand. At any rate, if it is only to take off those horrible clothes and give the children of the new world red tunics, it is a great work. Go on with it. Surely when the government sees that this new dance has the sympathy of the working people, it will do something for the school. . . .

The tournée is a continual catastrophe. We arrived again from Samarkand here without a kopeck. Again no hotel. Spent two nights wandering round the streets very hungry. Zeno and Metchick slept in the theatre. I, next door in a little house without water or toilet. Finally we found rooms in this fearful hotel over-run with vermin. We are so bitten as to appear to have some sort of illness.

Yesterday Zeno arranged on percentage an evening for the students, and they advanced ten *tchervonetz*, so we went to the restaurant and ate, first time in three days. The theatre is engaged. The first performance can only be given next Wednesday. Heaven knows what we will do until then. I only hope we can make enough for the train.

All this discomfort and worry has made us all ill. Poor Metchick looks dying. We arrived early in the morning and had to sit all day on park benches with nothing to eat. It's a horrid sensation. But this is a primitive, wild place, and anything can happen to one. It's the sort of place to come with Singer and his millions; very like Egypt. The heat is forty degrees more in the shade and flies, bugs, mosquitoes make life unbearable. . . .

Courage; it's a long way, but the light is ahead. My art was the flower of an epoch, but that epoch is dead and Europe is the past. The red tunicked kids are the future. So it is fine to work for them. Plough the ground, sow the seed, and prepare the next generation that will express the new world. What else is there to do? Give my love to I.I. and to the divine Podvowsky and to all friends. . . .

Love to the children. All my love to you. You are my only disciple and with you I see the Future. It is *there*—and we will dance the *Ninth Symphony* yet.

From Tashkent, another letter was sent on July 19th, and the same story was retold:

In fifty degrees (Centigrade) heat and half the time without eats in a fearful room. The hotel is called Turzika! It ought to be called Wanzens (Bedbugs) Home. I think my last hour is come. . . . I spend my nights in feverish bedbug hunts and listen to the dogs howl. *C'est très amusante!*

Wednesday is the first performance but—no sale. Darling says it's because I wear a funny hat. But I think the natives here are petrified of the heat. How we are ever going to return I don't know. The second-class fare and baggage to Ekaterinburg costs fifty *tchervonetz*!!!

. . . We came here because Zeno has an idiot for an advance man, who telegraphed us that prospects were "brilliant." He must have been hired by the ballet to bring us to ruin. When you have an inspiration to save us, for heaven's sake act on it for it is the last moment.

. . . . .  
I keep on making jokes which are not appreciated; but it's my Irish way.

That Isadora was able to crack jokes and had a sense of humor, which enabled her to take these incredible miseries and mishaps in her stride, most probably kept her from losing her temper and her mind. Even without the financial upsets, such a tour through that Godforsaken country would have taxed the spirits of the most indomitable traveller. In Ekaterinburg, where the trio landed at the end of July, the financial contretemps and daily calamities piled up. She wrote to Irma:

We arrived here more dead than alive after *five nights* on the R.R., twice changing trains and waiting all day in villages without hotels. The last day and night, third class on account of lack of funds. The money for the trip borrowed at the last moment from the government. . . .

This tournée is one calamity after another, for although I dance to large publics of communists and workmen, no one has money to buy tickets except the *new bourgeoisie*, and they cordially detest me. When we have a little money, Metchick takes it all on the pretext that he will not *play* unless he receives all the money at once. After that he calmly sits by and watches us starve. He is a wonderful *tovarish* and ought to be sent to Narimsky Kraim [The Siberian area where all speculators and crooks were sent].

A later letter from Ekaterinburg, sent on the 4th of August, apparently answered one from Irma who had been negotiating for a German tour for her mistress and friend:

The moment I received your letter I sent you a forty word telegram expressing my willingness to *sign at once*, and travel anywhere away from here!!! I still await anxiously the answer. You have no idea what a living nightmare is until you see this town. Perhaps the killing here of a *certain* family [the Czar, his wife and children] in a cellar has cast a sort of Edgar Allan Poe gloom over the place—or perhaps it was always like that. The

melancholy church bells ring every hour, fearful to hear. When you go in the streets the *gitan* yells *Pravda* or *Lieva* and points his gun at you. No one seems to have any sense of humor whatever.

The head of the communists said, "How could Metchick play such disgusting music as Liszt or Wagner!!!" Another said: "I did not at all understand the *Internationale!!!*"

Our two performances were a *four noir* and, as usual, we are stranded and don't know where to go. There is no restaurant here, only "common eating houses" and no coiffeur. The only remaining fossil of that name, while burning my hair off with trembling fingers, assured me there was not one *dama* here—they shot 'em all.

We saw the house and the cellar where they shot a *certain* family. Its psychosis seems to pervade the atmosphere. You can't imagine anything more fearful. . . . In fact this town is as near Hell as anything I have ever met.

From Vyatka, Isadora finally wrote on August 12th:

We were twelve days in that awful Ekaterinburg. Zeno gave 40 *tchervonetz* from the first concert to a man to book Siberia! The man departed with the 40 *tchervonetz* and telegraphed that Siberia was in ruins—no season—no public, etc. The man then returned, but without a kopeck!!! What had he done with the 40 *tchervonetz*? He had sent it to his wife who needed it. I gave this tournée for the benefit of other people's wives. Wonderful!

When I sent the 10 *tchervonetz*, we gave eight to the hotel, and two brought us as far as Perm. In Perm we did not make expenses; and arrived here without a kopeck. This is a village with an awful hotel. Bedbugs, mice and other agreements. The Savoy *first evening* was a *palais de luxe* in comparison. It is too awful. I haven't a bottle of eau de cologne, no soap nor toothpaste since a month. The beds are made of boards and populated. The stains and pistol shots in the mirror. *C'est très amusante*. My hair is quite white from lack of henna shampoo and I feel extremely *kaput*.

We telegraphed frantically for news of your contract but received no reply. The curtains, on account of being packed wet, are quite grey with mildew and all falling to pieces, impossible to use them.

With love to the children and love to you

*Sterbende* [dying] Isadora

Weary from the long train journey but happy to be home, the dancer finally reached Moscow towards the end of August. When she arrived at the house she was taken to the balcony of the great salon. From there she looked down on a massed group of over five hundred children. They cheered her and she smiled to them, waving her red scarf and bravely trying to hold back her tears. Then a band

played the *Internationale* and all the children danced past the balcony, each one holding high the hand of the comrade in front, the gesture which Isadora once taught the elder children, who in turn had passed it on to their younger pupils.

She wept to see them, saying to those about her on the balcony: "What do all my hardships matter after this: these children dancing and singing in the open air with fine, free movements?" And as they marched away to return to their daily lessons at Sparrow Hills, she could not remain behind to rest in the empty school. She followed them to the fields where they again marched and danced for her. Each day during the remainder of August she went out to the sports arena to teach the happy children, who were able to dispel, in a measure, all the nightmares of the previous weeks. The children gave Isadora much pleasure of which she wrote to her friends outside Russia. To a former secretary and friend in Paris she wrote:

Dear Dougie:

Thank you so much for your letter. No one ever writes me, and I seldom write because I never have money (*dingy*, it is called here) for a stamp!

The tenant of my house, 103 rue de la Pompe, never sends me the rent, and here it is almost impossible to make a penny.

I have just returned from a three months tournée to Samarkand, Turkistan and Ekaterinburg. The houses were packed but the audiences all insisted upon coming *free*, saying that as I was a communist I should dance for all comrades—which I would be very pleased to do. But the result was that we were stranded in almost every town without the R.R. fare to return to the next.

Here we have forty children. They dance beautifully, but they are almost always hungry. However, they have great spirit. They live on *kascha* and black bread, but when they dance you would swear they were fed on ambrosia.

This summer they went out to the Stadium and taught five hundred children of Trotsky's men to dance in the open air—it was a beautiful sight to see them in their red tunics and red scarves, dancing and singing the *Internationale*.

Everyone can say what they please, in spite of the catastrophe and suffering and all, the *idea* of the New World is born here, and nothing can kill it.

I may see you soon if a contract I am now negotiating for Europe goes through. I will be in Berlin by the end of September.

Give my love to all friends and much love to you from ever your friend and comrade

Isadora



You will be pleased to hear that I have not seen the turbulent Essenine since a year.

Delighted to be back in Moscow, she was especially happy to see the strides her little pupils had made among themselves and the work they were doing with the other children. She was also struck by the fact that they loved to march to and from the grounds singing. The thought came to her that she might compose dances for them to these songs. As they now danced the *Internationale*, singing at the same time the words their movements expressed, so might they dance their revolutionary songs.

One afternoon in a flood of inspiration she composed seven dances to seven popular songs which the children and the soldiers usually sang:

*With Courage, Comrades, March in Step*  
*One, Two Three*  
*The Young Guard*  
*The Blacksmith* (or "Forging the Keys of Freedom")  
*Dubinushka* (a work song)  
*The Varshavianka* ("In Memory of 1905")  
*The Young Pioneers*

Together with the two funeral marches in memory of Lenin, the girls, led by Irma, later danced and sang these works all over Russia, across Siberia and into China. After Isadora's death they also danced them to cheering audiences in France and America.

While Isadora was negotiating with the representative of the German impresario, she decided to take advantage of the empty Kamerny Theatre, whose permanent company was then on tour in Europe presenting their novel staging of well-known plays in their repertory. For these farewell performances she arranged several new programmes, notably a Scriabin-Liszt one, a Chopin programme, and an evening of her new revolutionary singing-dances.

For this last programme she arranged a series of dances inspired by revolutionary music of other countries. She herself opened the programme by miming *The Wearin' o' the Green* which Irma sang in the wings. This was followed by the girls dancing a version of an Irish jig and reel combined. A French Revolutionary episode followed this, and while she herself did her heroic dance, the words of the *Marseillaise* were sung off stage by one of the leading Bolshoi opera

singers. Then, with all the children, she followed this with a stirring *Carmagnole*. She ended the first part of the programme by dancing her thrilling rendition of the *Rakowsky March* which she had first created in Hungary in 1902.

The second part of the evening contained all the Russian singing dances which Isadora had recently composed for the girls—their first public presentation to an audience. As a grand finale, the pupils and the five hundred children they had worked with all summer danced and sang the *Internationale*, winding down off the stage and through the vibrant audience who joined them in the national anthem, finally cheering and yelling themselves hoarse in appreciation of the dancing children and their inspirer.

On Saturday, September 28th, 1924, the last performance was given before a crowded house where Madame Kalinina, the wife of the President of the U.S.S.R., led the applause. Tremendously impressed by the programme which the children danced, she went backstage after the performance to see Isadora. "What can I do for you?" she asked.

The dancer thought for a moment. "I would like to show the children in these new revolutionary dances to the leaders of the party. I am sure that if they saw them, and saw how wonderful the children are, they would do something to help the school. . . ."

"I could arrange a performance in the Bolshoi Theatre and invite the leaders personally. Will some time next week do?"

"I'm afraid not," said Isadora sadly. "If anything is done it must be done tomorrow night. You see, I must go to Berlin on Monday morning. I have a contract to fulfill there."

After reflecting, Madame Kalinina said: "You shall have your evening, tomorrow, Sunday. And I promise you the leaders will be there."

When one is the wife of the President and can command a host of clerks and telephones, matters are more rapidly arranged than in the ordinary course of events in bureaucratic Moscow. In less than a day Madame Kalinina had arranged for the performance at the Bolshoi. The leaders of the party and 4,000 young Pioneers and Communists had been invited. They, without doubt, made the most thunderously enthusiastic audience before which Isadora and her pupils had ever danced. Thrilled by the sight, the Commissar of Ed-

ucation and Fine Arts, Lunacharsky, made a long speech, stressing once more the importance of the great dancer's work with the younger generation.

The thrilling performance over and the cheers still resounding in the great theatre, Isadora was lovingly surrounded by the children whom her pupils had taught all summer in the Stadium. They were there to swell the numbers of the school proper in the final number—the *Internationale*. With one of her impetuous gestures of generosity, she opened her handbag and scattered among them all the money which she had gained from the recent Kamerny Theatre performances.

After a gay farewell supper, with much talk through the night of what the future held for the school and for her own fortunes, the party motored at dawn to the Trotsky Air Field. There Isadora embraced her friends and her faithful pupil Irma. She asked them to be sure and follow up the Kalinina affair. In a few moments the plane was off to Germany.

But the dancer was not yet out of Russia. A few hours later the plane was forced down in a field because of engine trouble, and before long they were surrounded by a group of peasant children who had seen the great metal bird swoop down out of the sky. Soon the dancer had her battered portable gramophone out and gave a dancing lesson to the delighted boys and girls. She recalled how once, when the train had brought her to Russia a few years before, she had given some other peasant children an informal dancing lesson. Now she was leaving the country, perhaps for the last time, and again teaching dancing to the same old gramophone. As the repaired plane flew away she wondered if this were the Omega to the Alpha incident; the final rounding of the circle.



Part V  
1924-1927



BERLIN-PARIS-NICE



## Chapter I



THE RUSSIAN CHAPTERS OF ISADORA'S EVENTFUL LIFE, WHICH HAD started with such idealistic hopes for the future, closed with only the vague feeling that maybe, *maybe* Madame Kalinina would be able to encourage the Soviet leaders to give the school a more secure status with real financial backing. Maybe she herself would be able to earn enough money—as she once had done to found the Grünewald venture—but that seemed so far away now. So much had happened to her and to the world in two decades. Settled in the Eden Hotel in Berlin she soon found out how changed things were. Her contract which had been negotiated in Russia with a Mr. Gallom, acting for Span & Francose of Berlin, she discovered to be a fraud. She felt utterly lost. Her two Berlin concerts, she wrote Irma, were crowded. "The audiences enthusiastic, and the critics mostly insulting. For some reason Span and Francose have disappeared. I am here in a fearfully expensive hotel without a penny. . . ."

She saw a lawyer from the Russian Embassy but realized that an action for fraud would be of no help in obtaining any ready money. In the hectic rush of the German capital she felt completely abandoned. "Telegraph me your advice," she wrote Irma. "I am nearly on the verge of suicide. Elizabeth cannot help, as she is very busy and has not a sou!!!"

When October came, there was no change in the tragic situation. She wrote:

It seems my fate in 1924 is to be tragically *stranded*. . . . Berlin is simply fearful. Better to sell matches on the streets in Moscow. . . . Elizabeth is sweet, but has not a pfennig!

She wrote again to Irma:

Altogether it is Hell!!! And I spend my time wondering which sort of poison doesn't hurt the most. I don't want to take any of the fearful kind.

Write me what is happening. If you can fix the contract for Siberia I will come. . . . Isadora, *Poor thing*. Love to you all. Maybe I die tonight.

Still stranded in the "awful city," but now at a less expensive hotel, she signed three more contracts and was swindled three times more. The last was for Hanover, and when the time came to leave, the agents didn't even have the money to pay for the railroad tickets. She wrote to Irma on November 27th:

I cannot move from here! Since four weeks the hotel will serve no more food. An American friend brings me a slice of roast beef a day, but he has no money either. . . . *Elizabeth has deserted me* and gone to visit a rich friend in Vienna. *Her school in Potsdam won't even let me in*. I was ill for two weeks with a bronchitis, and now, to cap the climax, an ulcerated tooth. I have telegraphed Raymond, but he is in Nice and apparently *can't* or *won't* do anything. Germany is the limit, simply fearful. . . . Yours in a dying stage.

Isadora

To complicate matters still further, she was unable to obtain a passport from the Russian Embassy in Berlin. A visa was refused for permission to go to Vienna and fulfill a contract in that city where she had danced with such success in her early years. "*Every country has refused me a visa on account of my 'political connections.'* What are my *political connections*? I am utterly stranded and lost here in a very hostile city. I haven't a single friend. . . ."

There were, of course, a few. Among those who succored the unfortunate dancer were two young American music students: a young singer named Martin and a pianist, Allan Coe. Although they were living on small allowances from home, they gallantly shared their money with their new friend. They kept her company and tried to cheer her up. When matters came to an impasse, Coe wrote to a friend in Paris.



Dougie:

We boys have given out our last cent, and we all three are broke—stranded! Honest to God!

Please go *personally* (not write) to Isadora's friends, and try to get some money, and telegraph it. Desperately.

Allan.

(Over)

On the reverse side of this appeal, scribbled and sprawling as though it were the work of one ill and despairing to the point of death, was a message from Isadora:

Where is Raymond?

I have written and telegraphed to him and to Aia in vain— Perhaps if you asked Walter [Morse Rummel] he would do something—or his dear brother, who really is my friend, Frank—

*Pour l'Amour de Dieu sauvez-moi.*

Love

Isadora.

But all the friends in Paris seemed to be concerned with the business of their own difficult existences. In America, an old friend managed to scrape together a few hundred dollars which were cabled to the stranded dancer, and with that sum she went on to Brussels. There her old friend, Cecile Sorel, was able to use her influence to obtain a French visa allowing her to get to Paris.

As always a great darkling cloud of myths swirled about the head of the dancer. There were those—and heads of governments among them—who were convinced that she was a paid propagandist for the Soviets. Another rumor had it that she was getting ready to publish her love letters as a sort of blackmail scheme to get money from her former lovers. Here Paris Singer was said to be principally involved.

She had no sooner arrived in Paris than the representatives of various sensational journals were hot on her heels, offering huge sums for the right to publish these documents. She told them that she was indeed thinking of writing her memoirs; they would concern, however, only the details of her art. Her art was more important to her, she stressed, than any of her passing love affairs.

To add to her own woes came the news that one of her six former pupils, the delicately lovely Margot, was very ill in a Parisian hospital. Before she could see her, word came that she had died. Life

now seemed completely unhappy and miserable, and her buoyant spirit appeared to sink before the overwhelming blows of fate. Here her brother Raymond, who had a flourishing business with stores and workshops in both Paris and Nice, at last came to her rescue. In his old Ford car which he himself drove—although garbed in a flowing Greek costume seemingly more suitable for a chariot—he carried her off to the Riviera. There he allowed her to sleep on one of the rug-covered benches in his small apartment on the Boulevard Gambetta in Nice.

The sun and the sea which she always loved revived her, and there were many friends about. One of the most faithful of these was the writer, George Maurevert. As an important contributor to the leading Nice newspaper, he was able to persuade the manager of the fashionable Negresco Hotel on the Promenade des Anglais, to give the dancer a small room with a bath at a greatly reduced rate. Her old resilient humor returned and soon she had discovered a small theatre in the Californie district of the Riviera resort. She was able to persuade one of her friends to rent it for her. If she could have this studio and drape it with her blue curtains, it might be possible to give performances during the season without the help of fraudulent impresarios. Her old grandiose schemes were reborn. Another school, perhaps, might be started there. Or maybe the best girls from the Moscow school might be brought to France. She wrote to Irma:

A friend took a studio for me here. It is a perfect gem. A little theatre twice as big as the Rue de la Pompe with a stage, footlights etc. If we could arrange for you to come here with sixteen of the most talented children, we might succeed in saving them. I tried through the Soviet Embassy in Paris to have the school brought in the Russian Dept. of the Decorative Arts Exposition, but without success. Have you been to Tovarish Kalinina? Can nothing be done?

The world is a sickening place. I am living from hand to mouth. My friends have all deserted me. The joke of the whole thing is that it is current gossip that I received vast sums from the Soviets. Isn't that beautiful?

Even without funds the days passed agreeably. She saw many friends and made new acquaintances. Occasionally she dined with Frank Harris or passed the evening with Maurevert. Spread out before the hotel was a bathing beach where it was pleasant to lie in the sun. For a while she was confined to bed with a poisoned arm which had

to be lanced after she had been stung by an insect. During this period she began to think of collecting together all the articles she had written on the dance. She also turned over in her mind the idea of a book which she was to call *My Bolshevik Days*. It was suggested to her by her friends that it might be better to begin at the beginning and tell her life from the earliest days in California, but she continually put aside any real consideration of this work. She was not a writer, she protested. Now if only Frank Harris or Blasco-Ibáñez, with their great knowledge of the art of writing, could be persuaded to collaborate with her, a sensational book would surely be the result. George Maurevert tells of how he took her to lunch with Ibáñez at this period.

Saturday, the 2nd of May, I had the honor of presenting the illustrious American artiste to the most celebrated Spanish novelist. . . . With the aid of his good and gracious wife, Blasco-Ibáñez offered us a *déjeuner* as exquisite as usual. . . . And he added the incomparable attraction of his torrential speech. . . . His whole being spoke of the joy of living. And how he knew the way to lift up the *morale*, to give hope, promising, if it were necessary, his aid.

I remember that Isadora Duncan had at that time many difficulties that could only be conjured away by the publication of her *Memoirs*. . . . But Isadora who was activity itself, at her debut as at the height of her great success, had become lazy and indifferent to everything. . . . She could not decide to start work on the memories, despite the fortune they represented. . . . Blasco chided her in a brotherly way: "If you can't write them, speak them! It's not difficult. There are writers who specialize in this sort of thing in America. I will have my agent send one over here if you wish. . . . You will tell him all your stories as though you were speaking to a friend. And he writes, he writes. You read, you correct . . . and then you sign. You see it's not so difficult. And you will gain millions and millions of francs! A name like yours represents a hundred editions! . . ."

Still preoccupied with the idea of bringing some of her pupils from Russia and perhaps obtaining help from the French Communist Party to start a new school in Paris where, she insisted, a thousand proletarian children could be taught, Isadora decided to return to Paris in the autumn of 1925. From the sun-drenched Riviera she went back to the Hôtel Palais d'Orsay. There she occupied a somber back room, but soon even the expense of this was too much. Credit was not easily extended there as it had been in earlier and more affluent times.

A South American admirer, Thalia Rosales, offered her a furnished studio in the rue des Sablons in Passy. To this drab place she moved her few portable belongings: a small diorite head of Buddha, photographs of Eleonora Duse, Gordon Craig, Ernst Haeckel, and others, her portable gramophone and records, a wicker basket of personal letters and manuscripts, and a few of her favorite bedside books. The place was unheated, had no bathroom, and facing, as it did, a commercial garage was none too tranquil. Here she spent many penniless days when nobody invited her out to dine; on other days some other artist friend would come to heat a tin of peas or beans on the electric ring and perhaps make some coffee. The damp and depressing winter was approaching and—miraculously obtaining some ready cash—she was finally able to move into a more elegant furnished apartment in the rue Franqueville in the Muette district.

In this tiny flat she was at least able to have a bath and invite her friends in for a potluck meal. There was a small balcony with a magnificent view of the city, and on rare occasions a friendly bottle of champagne could be left to cool there. Here she invited her good friend the novelist André Arnyvelde, to discuss with him the possibility of getting the French Communist Party to support the new school she had in mind. The writer Henriette Sauret, Arnyvelde's wife, records that Isadora told her husband:

Let them give me five hundred, a thousand children, and I will make them do wonderful things! . . . If they will give me a thousand children I will bring my best pupils from Moscow. They will act as monitors of the school, and they will live with me, being nourished and clothed by me. Living among my books and works of art, they will impregnated by my principles. . . .

Arnyvelde was taken with the idea, says Madame Sauret, and approached the party leaders. The negotiations trailed along, but as the period for which she had rented the little apartment was soon to expire, she began to think of returning to "Kundry's Garden" as she called Nice. In a final effort she invited a party delegate and Arnyvelde to lunch, and for this she spent her last few francs. The delegate was most enthusiastic about the idea, all the details were discussed and checked, and he left promising to push the leaders into making a rapid decision. After he had gone, the gay and hospitable

hostess turned to Arnyvelde: "Was the lunch good? And now I have only fifteen francs left! . . ."

She then gave him a little brooch which was one of her last and most cherished possessions. It was in the form of a butterfly whose body was formed by a black pearl. Perhaps he might be able to find a buyer for it which would enable her to hold out for a while longer.

"For several days," says Madame Sauret, "Arnyvelde made the rounds of the Parisian jewelers. The sum they offered was derisory. Hurt, he tried to telephone Isadora. . . . As there was no answer he inquired from some mutual friends what had happened. He learned from them that Isadora had gone off to Nice in a *wagon-salon*! Disconcerting Isadora!"

From Nice she wrote to him telling that she had gone there in despair. Her term in the rue de Franqueville had ended. "What to do? Suicide, or wait, or what?"

A second letter, dated the day before Christmas, explained that the hotel was giving her "artiste rates, very low, much less than the apartment in Paris." She also had the studio there where she could work a little. "Do not speak of my personal affairs," she wrote optimistically. "We will arrange them one way or another."

And so the discussion of the scheme for founding the school in Paris and bringing the children from Moscow dragged on into 1926. She went up again to Paris to see Rakowsky, the Soviet Ambassador. She saw him several times and had a final interview with the party delegate, leaving with him a packet of notes giving the exact work of the Moscow school and its present situation. This was the final desperate attempt towards realizing the scheme of which she had dreamed in so grandiose a way.

## Chapter II



AT THE END OF 1925 HAD COME THE SHATTERING NEWS OF SERGEI Essenine's death by suicide. . . . He had taken the very room in the Leningrad hotel where he had first lived in elegance with Isadora. With blood from the severed vein of his left wrist he left the following enigmatically dedicated poem:

### *To a Friend*

Good-bye, my friend, good-bye!  
You are still in my breast, beloved.  
This fated parting  
Holds for us a meeting in the future.

Good-bye, my friend, without hand or word;  
Be not sad nor lower your brow.  
In this life to die is not new,  
And to live, surely, is not any newer.

Having finished this, the unhappy poet hanged himself. His death was naturally a newsworthy story, and the French papers carried it with a rehash of his past adventures in Paris and several apocryphal incidents of his life with his illustrious wife in Russia and America. From Nice Isadora telegraphed the American and French news agencies her protest:

The news of the tragic death of Essenine has caused me the deepest pain. He had youth, beauty, genius. Not content with all these gifts, his audacious spirit sought the unattainable, and he wished to lay low the Philistines.

He has destroyed his young and splendid body, but his soul will live eternally in the soul of the Russian people and in the souls of those who love the poets. I protest strongly against the frivolous and inexact statements printed in the American press of Paris. There was never between Essenine and myself any quarrel or divorce. I weep his death with anguish and despair.

Isadora Duncan

To Irma, who wrote from Moscow giving fuller news of the poet's death and burial, she wrote on January 27, 1926:

I was terribly shocked about Sergei's death, but I wept and sobbed so many hours about him that it seems he had already exhausted any human capacity for suffering. Myself, I'm having an epoch of continual calamity that I am often tempted to follow his example, only I will walk into the *Sea*. Now in case I *don't* do that, here is a plan for the future. . . .

The plan set forth was centered about the little studio which now had carpet, stove and piano "thanks to dear *Augustin*, who gradually sent me the funds to get these things and keep the studio." The dancer thought that she could start "a *paying school* à la Elizabeth, and take pupils from America to board, etc. . . ." The climate was ideal and everything was wonderfully cheap. She wrote:

I see a future in the combining of this studio as a practical money-making affair and Moscow as Ideal and Art. But it has cost me the most heart-breaking effort to keep the studio, and if something is not done before April 15th, I'm afraid I will lose it. . . .

Besides the "practical money-making school" she had in mind, she also thought that brother Augustin might come over and stage plays in the studio for the "large English colony here in the summer." She continued: "I hope you will appreciate my bulldog tenacity in hanging on to this studio as I appreciate yours in hanging on to the school. . . . Remember you are the *only* pupil of mine who has understood what I am trying to do in this world."

Later she wrote again:

Dear Irma, if you will be faithful I still feel we may arise and conquer

the earth and knock all these sham schools and sham disciples to smash. But the time is going and I am like a wrecked mariner on a desert island, yelling for help. . . .

Nice, of course, was not exactly a desert island. She took a little apartment near the studio and made the acquaintance of a stranded Russian gentleman who consented to work as her secretary. She also found a pianist—a stranded Caucasian—who was willing to play for her so that she could rehearse. She celebrated Good Friday with a performance of sacred music and the dance which was attended by many old friends living along the Riviera, and she wrote to Irma:

The Good Friday performance was a great success. A hundred tickets were sold at a hundred francs a ticket and great *stimmung* and enthusiasm. The studio was lovely with alabaster lamps, candles, incense, heaps of white lilies and lilacs. Quite like the Archangel's times. Of course, it is the end of the season. If we only had had the money to open sooner we would have made a fortune. I have hopes of building a theatre here in a year or two. A Bayreuth by the Sea. . . .

Both the money gained from this one performance and the vision of building a theatre soon evaporated. The pianist, the florist and the man who rented the alabaster lamps had, perforce, to be paid; the season was ended. Paris was calling and she felt that were she there she could see the Russian Ambassador about the proposed coming of the Moscow children. She might also be able to get a contract for the memoirs on which she had begun to work. With superb unconcern she went to a garage and rented a small car and chauffeur. On for Paris and the Hôtel Lutetia!

Each day the hired car stood outside the hotel awaiting Madame's orders. Each day a little more was added to the mounting bill for its hire and the chauffeur's wages. She stayed at the hotel *en pension*—as a means of economy, she laughingly told her friends. Soon she discovered that the meals served, mostly in her room, were of fairly generous proportions, and so invariably she would invite some impecunious writer or artistic admirer to come and share the lunches or dinners with her. On these social occasions she would order a bottle of wine and an extra dish from the regular menu. It never entered her head that the cost of these two extra items always came to much more than the total cost of the *table d'hôte* meal.



At last, finding that there was nothing to be done either for her scheme of bringing the children from Moscow or of finding a publisher for her proposed memoirs, she decided to take refuge once more in her Nice Studio. She persuaded two friends to accompany her on the drive back: the journalist Walter Shaw and his friend, the actor Marcel Herrand—"Mes deux pigeons," she called them.

As her two pigeons were as poor as she, Isadora passed a relatively simple existence in the little apartment in Nice. There was no money in sight, a small fortune having been spent paying for the hire of the car and the back wages of the chauffeur. But sun bathing and sea bathing cost nothing, and there were always visits to the villas of rich friends all along the coast and visits from old friends such as Frank Harris, Jean Cocteau, George Maurevert and other figures of the artistic, musical, and movie worlds.

As the summer passed there were long rehearsals with the Caucasian pianist, Irakli Orbeliani. She was particularly engrossed in working out a new creation arranged to the music of Franz Liszt's sonata *After Reading Dante*. This she finally danced to a select public gathered in her studio on September 10th. To precede the new monumental work, she danced Liszt's *Les Funérailles* and his *Legend of St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*. The second part of the program was devoted to Wagner's *Träume* and the Liszt piano transcription of Wagner's death of Isolde.

Four days later another public performance was given in the studio with the assistance of Jean Cocteau. To the poet's *Orphée*, which he read, Isadora danced. The remainder of the programme was given over to the reading of a group of Cocteau's recent poems, followed by a reading by Marcel Herrand of some of his poetry. For the printed programme of this unique performance the versatile Cocteau also designed a cover.

It was now the dead season on the Riviera; the summer visitors had departed and those coming for the winter season had not yet arrived. It would be better, maybe, she thought hopefully, to return to Paris for the moment. Things were happening there! And one of these things, she discovered when she returned to the Lutetia, was a new financial worry. Her house in Neuilly was to be sold to pay a debt which in 1922 had been 3,000 francs. By the addition of in-

numerable bailiff's fees it now mounted to over 10,000 francs. For some time she had made desperate efforts to sell the valuable property which stood in its own grounds near the American Hospital, but her efforts and those of her friends to get even a fraction of its price were unavailing. The place carried innumerable mortgages which Isadora had obtained through the years, and it was also occupied by a soap and perfume manufacturer whose lease still had some years to run. The ill-fated place, which held so many painful memories for the dancer, also had a protracted and irritating lawsuit hanging over it, for an artist to whom she had previously rented it had found that the previous rent-free tenants—Isadora's brother and his disciples—had taken the bath-tub and the movable plumbing with them upon their enforced departure!

The judicial sale of the house took place on November 25th, 1926, and the valuable property was sold for the small sum of 310,000 francs. By an ironic coincidence, the dancer had been informed the day before the sale that the Moscow Court had decided that as she was the only legal widow of Essenine, she was, therefore, the heir to his estate. This consisted at the moment of 400,000 francs, resulting from the continuing royalties from the fantastic sale of his books in Russia following his death. Penniless though she was, Isadora drafted a telegram to the Chief Judge of the Moscow Court waiving all rights to the poet's fortune. She suggested that it be turned over to his sister and mother, peasants who probably needed it more than she did! . . .

Off and on she continued working on her memoirs. Sometimes she wrote in longhand, especially in those passages having to do with the children and their tragic death, and sometimes she used a stenographer and friends. As she told her amusing stories to the delighted listeners, the stenographer took them down in shorthand and later typed them for correction by the author. She came to believe that her stenographer in Nice, a Miss Nickson, was more understanding and did the difficult chore much better, and she longed to leave Paris and return to the studio and apartment in Nice.

The bill which had been accumulating at the Paris hotel prevented her from leaving immediately, but, of course, the Good Samaritan—

and one always seemed to hover somewhere in the background—came forward. This time it was Madame Lotte Yorska who, although her personal fortune was not great, managed to find enough ready cash to clear off the Lutetia bill. Lighthearted and in company with Vitya Seroff, a young Russian pianist whom she had recently met and liked, she went off once more to "Kundry's Garden."

In the meantime, her brother Augustin in New York and various other friends were attempting to find a buyer for the proposed memoirs. One of the publishing houses approached finally had their Paris agent draw up a contract for the book. They consented to give an advance of two thousand dollars, with an added bonus of five hundred dollars if the completed manuscript was finished by the end of May, 1927. The sum was to be doled out by the agent as he received the pages of the manuscript. At the beginning of 1927 he went down to Nice and Isadora finally signed the contract.

To a friend who went to see her there in February she smilingly said: "It's not very good, is it? But it's signed. Now I must go on and finish it. But how can I write? You'll have to help me."

"Nonsense, Isadora!" replied her friend. "The first parts which I read in Paris are marvellous. You have a real gift for expression; you have a very personal idiom. Don't you remember once saying that as a dancer you were a great public speaker?"

"Yes," she laughed softly. "How you and all my other friends hated to hear me 'spoil' my performances by speaking what was on my mind. . . . You must come to the Negresco now and hear me speak my piece to my 'little woman in rusty black,' Miss Nickson."

But what she found when she and her friend reached the elegant hotel was an itemized bill for nine thousand francs. There was also an impersonal note from the office intimating that if the long overdue bill was not paid that night, Madame Duncan would have to vacate her room. Instead of taking dictation, the stenographer was dispatched to see if it were possible to talk the manager out of the idea of immediate payment of the bill. She came back to report that the assistant manager had said he could do nothing; he was merely carrying out a new ruling.

With regal indignation Isadora picked up the phone and asked if

the manager would kindly come up and see her. In a few minutes he was bowing his way deferentially into the room. Languidly reclining on her bed, the dancer turned her most charming smile on him, and sweetly said: "I do not understand why you bother me with this bill for a paltry nine thousand francs. After all you know quite well who I am. I have been one of your most famous and regular clients. There have been nights when I have spent in your halls double and triple the sum of this bill. For the moment I have no money, I am waiting the outcome of the sale of my property in Neuilly. . . ." Here she carelessly tossed on the bed a handful of clippings, which she carried about in her handbag, and which related the details of the Neuilly business. Earlier that day she had vanquished with these same much-handled pieces of newspaper the tradesman who had dunned her for the payment of a bill for the hire of some alabaster lamps which she had used in her studio.

The manager politely glanced at the clippings as Isadora continued her improvisation. "My money is all in Paris, tied up in this fight. If I am to get it I must go there. In fact I was planning to go there tomorrow." This was news to her friend—the first he had heard of the proposed trip. "If you feel you must have security for this absurd bill, I will leave you my Renault car in the garage. . . ." There *was* a Renault car in the garage in her name but it did not belong to her. An American friend who had been shocked by the money wasted on the hired Mathis car had bought this small vehicle. Isadora was to have the use of it, but so that it could not be sold or pawned, the friend had kept the title to it in her own name.

The manager retired bowing from the room, backwards as one does from a royal presence. He hoped that he had not inconvenienced Madame Duncan. He hoped also that her affairs would soon be straightened out in Paris. And when was she leaving for Paris? Would she step into his office at her convenience before she left and sign some papers for the car?

"This is very annoying," said the imperturbed Isadora as the door closed on the obsequious manager. "Now I won't be able to ask him to cash this check." Another crumpled piece of paper was fished from the bag. A fifty dollar check from another American admirer. It was later cashed, after some insistence, by the cashier of the restaurant

where she took her friend and two others to dinner. And next morning, with a few personal belongings packed in a small suitcase, she cheerfully signed over the Renault car, left behind her trunks and the wicker basket with her letters and documents, and caught the noon train for Paris.

## Chapter III



ON THE MORNING OF FEBRUARY 6TH, SHE ARRIVED BACK IN PARIS. IT was suggested to her that she go to the newly opened studio-hotel in the rue Delambre in the Montparnasse district. There she rented a large studio—with an open fireplace, bedroom, balcony, bath and kitchenette—all for the price of a fair-sized room in a fashionable hotel. So, with her Russian companion-accompanist Vitya, she installed herself. Dressed in a rose colored Fortuny gown recently discovered in a lost trunk which a friend had found and brought over from New York, she was able to receive her many friends.

For the time being the important matter was the buying back of the Neuilly house when it came up for auction a second time. To accomplish this a distinguished committee had been formed after a meeting in the apartment of Miss Dorothy Ireland. The group consisted of Madame Cecile Sartoris, who acted as treasurer, Madame Yorska, and three French men of letters and old friends of the dancer: Andre Amyvelde, George Denis, and Alfredo Sides. With the aid of the daily theatrical newspaper, *Comédia*, and the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* which opened their columns to the movement, a public subscription was started. The committee also solicited works of art—Bourdelle, for instance, contributed a cast of his Bacchante—which were to be auctioned off later.

Madame Yorska wrote a moving appeal which Isadora's old friend,

Mary Fanton Roberts, published in her magazine in New York. The article told of a visit the famous actress had paid to the stranded dancer in 1925 when she was starving in the bleak studio in the rue des Sablons. Madame Yorska wrote:

I heard she was alone in Paris, and without funds. I looked her up. A friend had lent her a small studio . . . I found her reading. She looked so perfectly happy that I thought reports must be exaggerated. As I could not get her to talk about her affairs, I went at it bluntly.

"Just how much money have you left, Isadora?"

She laughed, emptied her purse, and said: "Let's count together. . . . Five francs, thirty-five centimes."

I burst into tears. "This is dreadful! Something must be done immediately. How can you sit there and read so quietly?"

"I was having a beautiful time. I was reading the *Song of Songs* of Solomon. Do you know the beautiful English version of Julia Ellsworth Ford? Yorska, dear, read it aloud to me."

"Now? Certainly not. We must talk of your affairs first. Isadora, won't you make just one concession to necessity? The Champs-Élysées Music Hall will give you fifty thousand francs for two weeks. They'll book you immediately."

"Never, never! I've never criticized any artiste who sold her body to save her art, though I don't believe art can be saved that way; but I cannot forgive anyone for betraying one's art. Art is sacred. It is the most sacred thing in the world, after children. . . . When I posed for Bourdelle for the bas-reliefs, I thought that that theatre was going to be a temple. . . . Don't worry, dear, something will happen. . . . You've brought me lilies and fruit. I shall dance in front of the lilies, and I shall eat the fruit after deserving it. Tomorrow I'm invited out to dinner. Besides I'm expecting a cable from someone who will not refuse to loan me a thousand dollars."

"Where are your personal things?"

"There, in that bag."

"There are only papers in that bag. I mean where are your clothes."

"I have them on me. That bag contains all my treasures—and such treasures! Letters of love, to myself, to my art . . . to the memory of my children. Do you know that I see them every night? That is why I'm afraid of the night. . . . Read me the *Song of Solomon*."

When I finished the book she was crying. . . .

With the usual divergences of opinion, the committee continued to raise the money to buy back the Neuilly house and turn it into an Isadora Duncan Memorial School where she would be allowed to live freely for the rest of her life. While they talked and discussed prob-

lems and plans, Isadora also talked. All through the spring months she dictated and corrected her memoirs so that they could finally be typed and sent to New York. There were many know-alls who said that the dancer had a "ghost" do the book for her. But in this as in all else in her full life she never worked as others did. She stuck to her dictation and wrote out the more intimate or tragic chapters in long-hand.

As she worked in the Delambre studio, she was always happy to entertain her friends. One who often came to cheer her up in these difficult days was the famous Marxist theorist and former deputy, Charles Rappoport. To her other friends who would laughingly demand what she could see in this little, bearded old codger, who looked, they said, like nothing so much as a bespectacled gorilla, she would reply very gently: "You must never pay attention to the outward envelope. Rappoport is a great, good soul. He is intelligence itself. *Il n'y que deux choses qui comptent dans la vie—la Bonté et l'Intelligence. Mais la Bonté d'abord* [Only two things count in life—Goodness and Intelligence. But Goodness first]."

To many of her friends Rappoport was merely a detestable Communist as well as an ugly old man. To Isadora he was neither the one nor the other; he was a good and highly intelligent friend to whom she could talk intelligently. It is recorded by another friend, who found her one night reclining sadly on her studio couch, how she brightened up when Rappoport came in. He had just had dinner at the Russian Embassy where he had sat next to the Ambassadors, Madame Rakowsky.

"I wanted to get her interested in your school committee," said Rappoport. "I didn't want to do it brusquely. So I began to quote Renan's *Prière sur l'Acropol*. From that it was an easy transition to you." Here he took from one of his pockets, always bulging with newspapers and pamphlets, a small well-fingered volume. Sliding down from his chair before the couch, he knelt and began to read the famous passage which Isadora already knew well by heart: "'Oh, Nobleness! Oh, Beauty, simple and true! (c'est toi Isadora!) Goddess, whose worship signifies Wisdom and Reason. Thou, whose Temple is a lesson of Eternal conscience and sincerity, too late do I come to the threshold of thy mysteries. . . .'" She listened to the



end and wept as she had wept when Yorska read to her the *Song of Songs*.

During the late spring and early summer the little studio was constantly filled with friends arriving from America. Two of these were specially dear to Isadora: the much-married Mary Sturgess, now called Desti, and the artist, Edward Steichen, whose photographs taken on the Greek trip in 1920 were among the most beautiful ever done of the dancer. Irma Duncan came on briefly from Russia to visit her foster-mother and tell her of the tour which the school had made with great success and enthusiasm through Siberia and revolution-torn China.

Towards the end of June a performance had been arranged for Isadora at the Mogador Theatre which Irma had hoped to be able to see. This, however, was postponed to July 8th and she was unable to remain in Paris to see it. When the performance did take place the theatre was packed by a distinguished and enthusiastic audience of the dancer's American and French admirers. Two great French theatrical personalities in the persons of Yvette Guilbert and Cecile Sorel led the applause. The Pasdeloup Orchestra under the baton of Albert Wolff provided the musical support.

The matinee opened with the *Alegretto* from César Franck's Symphony and followed with Isadora's rendition of the French master's *Rédemption*, one of the monumental creations of her last years. Then came the Schubert *Ave Maria* danced with such moving beauty that there were those in the audience who unashamedly sobbed aloud. (Will they ever forget the ineffable gesture of the maternal arms cradling nothing? The moving tenderness and heartbreaking simplicity of it?) Then the orchestra alone played the first movement of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony*, and Isadora danced her conception with a more tragic profundity than ever before.

After the intermission came the Wagnerian part of the programme. In this she did her well-known "Bacchanal" from *Tannhäuser* and the "Love-Death of Isolde." Between these two grandiose creations the orchestra played the "Funeral March" from *Siegfried*. At the end of the programme, as the audience cheered, Isadora came forward and beckoned to the men of the orchestra to share in the continuing ovation; she also called Wolff to come upon the stage with her and

stood with him on the flower-strewn stage, bowing and smiling. No speech! No word to her happy and cheering friends and admirers? For some this was a sad and unusual omission. . . .

Writing afterwards of the performance, Henriette Sauret said:

Poor great Isadora! . . . After the applause and the recalls, I saw her again before the blue curtains, standing between the clusters of trembling flowers, making towards the orchestra leader and the musicians the sweet gesture which associated them with her triumph.

We went to congratulate her in her dressing room. She lay there, her bare feet coming out from her half-detached dress, her lovely arms holding up her tired head. Her look was heavy, her made-up mouth was silent, and the red locks of her hair, twisted in curls like those of an antique statue, fell on her shoulders like weighty stalks. She had lain down, without paying much attention, on the slight costumes which she had worn in the course of the matinee and thrown pell-mell on the divan. And on that chaos of crumpled veils of rainbow shades, she seemed to have fallen, a vanquished goddess. . . .

I do not know why, at that moment, the heart oppressed in spite of the joy she had just given us, I recalled the picture of Elizabeth of England dying on her royal carpet piled high with cushions, surrounded by courtiers and ladies of honor. . . .

The Mogador performance was followed by a period of waiting for results from the sale of the serial rights to the book now going the rounds of editorial offices in England and America. Towards the beginning of August the financial fruits began to come in: three hundred pounds for the first serial rights in an English newspaper. The sum was merely sufficient to pay the accumulated bills at the studio hotel.

The city was beginning to empty for the late summer, and among those leaving for the south was a friend of Isadora's accompanist. She offered the back seat of her small car to the dancer and Mary Desti; the Russian pianist was to follow by train. By the time they reached Lyons, the two difficult guests continued by train to Nice. There they were joined by Seroff, who lived with them in an expensive hotel, and there they eagerly awaited news of the American serial rights—news which never came. The few francs of their common fund were quickly spent on that gay coast where money slides easily through insouciant fingers. On some borrowed cash the accompanist took the train back to Paris to see what could be done.

After he had been absent for a while, Isadora sat down on Sunday,

September 11th, and wrote four letters at one sitting. The last of these was addressed to her Russian "spirit-child," as she called the accompanist:

Darling:

"Why no letter? No telegram? Nothing from you? . . . I miss you dreadfully—but we are in such a Hell of a fix here. Mary insisted on leaving that nice hotel where we had credit and coming here where we have none, and the result is we have nothing to eat—and no way of getting out unless I can sell the furniture here (The Studio). So I can't very well wish you here under such deplorable circumstances.

Did you see Cecile? We are in the dark as to whether Houssard has made the mortgage or not. Mr. Schneider could not place the book and has gone to Italy. Our only hope is the American serial—but no word yet.

If nothing else turns up, I will try to sell everything here and return to Paris. This place seems to be a *Jonah*.

Do write and tell me what you are doing—and what your plans are. . . .

Are you living in your studio—are you playing beautiful music? Think of me and play Scriabin. Perhaps you will be nearer to my spirit when the body with all its material nuisance is not there. There are a few inspired moments in life and the rest is *Chipoka* [rubbish].

I kiss you tenderly with all my love,

Isadora

With no money in hand and none in sight, Mary Desti decided to go and see Paris Singer who was summering in his Villa des Rochers at St. Jean-Cap Ferrat. No longer the millionaire he had once been—the collapse of the Florida land boom had engulfed an incredible sum rashly invested in real estate in Palm Beach—Singer nevertheless agreed to come to the help of his old friend. She was, he could never forget, the bereaved mother of his son and, in spite of all her idiosyncrasies and Irish deviltries, a great artist whose creations he still admired.

Things, it seemed, were going to brighten up! On Monday, September 12th, the two women went gayly to a luncheon party given by Robert Winthrop Chandler, the American painter, and Miss Clemence Randolph. There was much rollicking and laughter during the lunch, and Mary Desti had the dubiously amusing idea of sending a cable to a sensational New York tabloid announcing the fictive forthcoming marriage of the dancer to Chandler. Another

subject of many jokes at the lunch was Isadora's passionate interest in a small Bugatti sports car and its handsome Italian driver. The dancer had seen the car outside La Mère Tetu's, where they were lunching a few days before, and later in the dining room she had noticed a handsome young Italian who surely could be none other than the owner. From that moment the car and its driver became an obsession with her. She even began to make plans, penniless as she was at the time, to buy the car! An arrangement was made with Benoit Falchetto, as the garage proprietor who owned the car was named, to call at the studio in Nice, and discuss the matter. He agreed to come on Wednesday night, September 14th, and take the charming prospective client for a trial drive.

On the evening before Isadora and Mary Desti were invited to dinner at the house of her friend and manager to discuss the possibilities for a *tournee* along the Riviera which Singer might possibly underwrite. Following the dinner, the hosts brought their child into the room to meet the distinguished guest. The ingenuous smile of the little girl struck the dancer to the heart. She gave a piteous cry and rushed from the room. Desti followed her and found her zigzagging down the silent street, convulsive sobs shaking her body. . . .

At dawn the next morning Isadora went to her friend's room. Her eyes were swollen and red. She had wept all night. "Mary," she said, "I cannot go on like this. For fourteen years I have had this pain in my heart. I cannot go on. . . . You must find some way for me to end it all. I cannot continue to live in a world where there are beautiful, blue-eyed, golden-haired children. I cannot, I cannot. . . ."

She could not know that her friend had unwittingly brought the instrument of death with her when she presented to her the red silk shawl a few months before. After dining at the little sea-front restaurant that evening, they returned to the studio to await the coming of the handsome Italian. As they waited Isadora impatiently put a record on her portable gramophone and danced about to its popular song:

*Bye, bye, Blackbird . . .*

A rap on the door. The happy dancer, who was already wearing her red cashmere *Marseillaise* shawl, seized her heavy silk-fringed shawl, wound it about her neck, and danced to the door to welcome

Falchetto. Looking at her scant attire, Desti suggested that she had perhaps better wear her cloak to keep warm in the open car.

"Nonsense, I shall be quite warm in my red shawl."

Falchetto protested that his car was not very clean. "Perhaps Madame would wear my leather coat?"

Isadora shook her head. The driver walked down the path towards the car and Isadora danced after him. As she was about to step into the seat beside the driver, she turned and waved to Desti and a friend, calling to them: "*Adieu, mes amis, je vais à la gloire!* [Goodbye, friends, I'm off to glory!]"

Before the car started she was seen to throw over her left shoulder the long-fringed end of the shawl which was wound twice round her neck. The car darted forward and the shawl seemed to trail alongside. Desti screamed: "*Ton châle, Isadora! Remasse ton châle* [Your shawl, Isadora! Pick up your shawl]."

They saw the car stop, and thought that it did so to allow the dancer to pick up the end of the silk shawl. They ran towards it and saw that her head had fallen forward and she was motionless. The driver was out of the car gesticulating, shouting in Italian: "*Madonna mia! I've killed the Madonna!*"

The fringes of the shawl, they saw, and part of the shawl itself were tightly wound about the hub and spokes of the wheel. Death, on whom Isadora had so often called since that dreadful day in April, 1913, had finally and implacably struck. With one swift blow her larynx had been crushed, her neck broken, and her carotid artery burst.

The sobbing friends frantically cut and tore the thick silk from about the hub and hurried the dancer to St. Roch's Hospital. There the doctors pronounced the death as having been instantaneous. And when all the necessary formalities had been performed the body was sorrowfully borne back to the studio—now transformed into a mortuary chamber.

From all along the Riviera came grief-stricken friends to file into the silent, candle-lit, beflowered studio. From his villa came the weeping Paris Singer, who generously helped with the necessary arrangements for the entrainment of the body to Paris. Covered with the purple cape which she had always worn while dancing to Liszt's *Les Funérailles* and Chopin's *B Minor Sonata*, the casket was placed on

the northbound express that carried it to the capital on Saturday afternoon. At the Gare de Lyons it was met by the unrestrained sobs and tears of the group of friends who accompanied it to the little studio of her brother in Auteuil. There her blue curtains had been hung to cover up the paint pots and other materials, and there her intimates kept vigil until the morning of Monday.

## Chapter IV



ON THE MORNING OF MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 19TH, THE FRIENDS OF THE dead dancer gathered to escort her body to the Père La Chaise crematorium. As they assembled at the studio where the body had lain in state, bringing with them their various tributes of autumnal flowers, the sound of music met them. In an adjoining room the piano was being played by Ralph Lawton, an American concert artist who had accompanied Isadora at her appearances in Brussels upon her return from Russia. He was playing some of the dancer's favorite pieces by Beethoven and Chopin.

At eleven o'clock, the men of the *pompes funèbres* carried out the sealed coffin and the flowers to the waiting hearse. Her funeral purple velvet cloak was draped over the coffin and the flowers arranged over that. Just before the signal to start off was given, "little brother Raymond" stepped forward, and producing a large folded American flag, which he seemed to have had concealed somewhere in his Greek raiment, draped it over one end of the coffin. At that moment Marie Desti proceeded to rearrange the broad red ribbons of a bunch of scarlet gladiolis so that the gold-imprinted **THE HEART OF RUSSIA WEEPS FOR ISADORA** might be more easily read. After all, it was she who had paid for the flowers and thought up the tendentious inscription!

The signal was given by the black-caped master of ceremonies and the hearse started off on its long journey through the Paris streets. The mourners were led by Raymond, Vitya, Dougie: her brother, lover, friend. Behind them walked a straggling group of intimate friends, unknown acquaintances and anonymous mourners: Lisa Duncan, the only pupil then in Paris; Christine Dallies, Fernand Diviore, Jose Clara, old and faithful friends; Janet Flanner and Mercedes de Acosta, more recent American friends; Albert Wolff who had conducted the orchestra at the final concert; Marcel Hermand, Madame Yorska, and many others.

Slowly the procession passed over the Pont de Grenelle where stands a small reproduction of Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty. This detour had been made necessary by the imminent American Legion procession to the Trocadéro. The funeral *cortege* was forced to keep to the left bank of the Seine until it reached the Pont Royale. Passing the Champ de Mars, a few legionnaires hurrying across the bridge to the twin-towered Trocadéro stopped to stare at the strange procession led by the little man with a fillet about his brow and draped in a gray-white blanket.

In the great hall towards which the legionnaires were headed that morning, more than a quarter of a century before, Isadora had first received the revelation of what Greek tragedy could be when acted by a genius like Mounet-Sully. In the same vast auditorium she herself had danced Gluck's *Orpheus* with the same actor declaiming the choruses. With her lovely girls, or alone; with the accompaniment of piano or large symphonic orchestra, she had danced to the music of Gluck, Beethoven, Bach, Wagner, Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Scriabin; and in the uplifting of her graceful arms she had always embraced in love the thousands who sat like children under her magnetic spell.

So the procession went along under the sere-leaved plane trees of the Quai d'Orsay. Beyond the Pont de l'Alma stood the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées whose marble bas-reliefs of the dance by Bourdelle will long remain as a memorial to the passing artiste.

So then by the quais of the left bank, past the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, past the Chamber of Deputies, past the Hôtel Palais d'Orsay where she had lived briefly with Walter Rummel in 1918. At the



Pont Royale the cortege turned to go through the Tuileries Gardens to the rue de Rivoli. Down the street came two battalions of *Chasseurs Alpins* on their way to guard the American Legion parade from any interference by Communists and radical sympathizers of the recently executed Sacco and Vanzetti.

The stiff, bemedalled officer on horseback brought his shining sabre to a salute as he passed the hearse; then turned to shout the command: "Attention! Eyes left!" All the other officers on foot saluted briskly with their upturned sabers as they passed; the soldiers turned their eyes towards the hearse as they marched past in cadence; the standard bearers dipped their tricolor flags and regimental colors. Doubtless none of them knew that the corpse to which they were giving their traditional salute had once been as passionate a Sacco and Vanzetti sympathizer as any assumed likely to trouble the Legion parade that day.

But the women in the more populous sections of the rue de Rivoli and the working men there knew who lay in the coffin. "*Pauvre Isadora!*" they said, crossing themselves, or saluting with raised hats. Many of them remembered the white coffins which had passed that way fourteen years before. "*Pauvre Isadora!*" To the right stood the Chatélet theatre where she had triumphed so often and where her performances were so tragically interrupted in that April of 1913. Up there on the left, further up the Boulevard de Strasbourg, was the Théâtre de la Gaîté-Lyrique, where she and her first school of happy little German girls charmed the public in 1909.

On then, and through the Place de la Bastille and down the rue Roquette; past the grim prison housing unlucky and miserable youth and so to the principal portal of the final resting place Père La Chaise. A drizzling rain had begun but it could not drive away the thousands of mourners who stood by the gates to escort the sad procession on the last lap of the journey up the long winding road to the crematorium building. The wide space before the chapel was black with thousands of people, of all ranks and stations, come to pay their last respects to one who had once given them an all-too-brief sight of beauty.

As the coffin was taken from the hearse to the furnace room, the music in the chapel began. Ralph Lawton played Liszt's *Les Funé-*

*railles*; the Calvet Quartette played a Beethoven *Andante*; and Garcia-Marsellac sang Schubert's *Ave Maria*. As the Quartette was about to play again, the mourners were astonished to see the dancer's brother arise from his seat in the front row, march down the central aisle with his toga flying behind him, and go towards the main door as though impelled by some irresistible force. The guardian opened the portals for him, and soon above the murmurs of the crowds outdoors came the assured and emotionless voice shouting in American-accented French: "We started out from San Francisco many years ago. We were four and now we are three. . . ."

Inside the chapel, Mary Desti was heard to murmur between her sobs: "They were *one* and now they are *none*!" The nasal voice rose and fell on the sharp autumn air as though addressing a political meeting. When the speaker had finished his untoward harangue he strode back to his seat among his disciples. The arrested musicians then played the famous *Aria* from the Bach suite. This favorite piece of Isadora's, so charged with its own emotional beauty and with the memories which the dancer's intimate friends knew well were attached to it, swept over them and broke down any resistance they may have felt about publicly showing their grief. Many of them wept and sobbed like little children—hard, body-racking sobs that could not be stayed.

With the last notes of the music stilled, the poet Fernand Divoire ascended the pulpit. His voice held steady by a supreme effort of will, he read his tribute to his adored goddess about whose divine body the flames were then curling. "*Always fire and water and sudden fearful death!*" Then, when the music of his voice, almost sobbing out the final word of his oration, had passed over the still audience, the voice of the baritone began singing the favorite song of Eleonora Duse, the song she had sung for Isadora at Viareggio after the death of Patrick and Deirdre: Beethoven's *In Questa Tomba Oscura*.

In this dark tomb  
Let me be at rest.  
When I was living,  
Then, it was, you should have thought of me,  
Oh, ungrateful one!

As Lawton played a Chopin *Nocturne*, the family were led behind the curtain to see the ashes placed and sealed in the small casket. This was then covered with the purple mantle and borne to the place in the wall of the columbarium outside where it was to be sealed up. The orderless mourners straggled to the place where the two marble slabs bore the simple words: *Deirdre. Patrick.*

Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney sweepers, come to dust.

murmured someone sadly as he turned away, following the others. He thought of Divoire's funeral oration which had spoken for them all:

One of her friends, who was at times a fainthearted friend, stands here in all humility to speak with the voice of her friends. Today there is not one of her friends, not one of her relations, who does not feel in his heart some humility: humility of men of goodwill before genius; humility of poor souls before a soul generous with all richness; humility which makes us tell what dew fell on us from this genius, and how, out of hard, shriveled, crabbed seeds she tried to bring forth little flowers athirst for light—athirst for her light.

My voice at this moment is trying to cover another sound, the only sound that remains in your mind as I speak—the voice of the fire. Fire, the last vibration, the final music, which, while we sit here, the body that was Isadora, obeys.

That body, in the service of a soul, was Beauty. This fire, what is it if not the abyss that saves from the horrors of obscurity, the horrors of the struggle with the earth? There are some, of whom, perhaps we are not, who prefer, enflamed, the abyss surrounded by a golden glory to the soiled mediocrity of grey and black tears.

Isadora is here. Isadora has ended the labor of her mission. Her mission was one of defiance. And that defiance was always of such an elevation, of such a violence, that never for a moment was Destiny unaware of it. Not any more than Destiny was unaware of the mission of Prometheus.

Endlessly Destiny struck at her with the implacability of a human judge. Now Destiny, with a brutality that was perhaps pity, has at length set down the final period, the OMEGA of all human careers to its vengeance. It strangled her just after she had danced once more.

I am not great enough to know if, on the fourteenth of September, 1927, Destiny honored itself, as we say.

What did Isadora want that so irritated the Gods? When I say Gods,

each of you, deep in your heart's core, will understand a different thing, which is the truth.

She wanted Joy. She wanted Beauty. She wanted Joy and Beauty, because she was Joy and Beauty.

Before Death—before that Death who pretends to be the ultimate reality and whom we would fain ignore, whom we would overstep—what signifies Joy and Beauty. Joy and Beauty signifies that which passes over Death.

For fourteen years, since the day that already brought us to this place, and of which no image has ever faded from before our mind's eye, Isadora, as soon as she could lift up a shattered body and heart and soul, Isadora danced the great dance of regeneration—Suffering—Struggle—Triumph.

Where now is the Triumph? We ask one another, and from one another we beg a reply. And only in our own hope, in our own faith, do we find the reply.

Today the great harp tuned to the dance of the world, the great harp tuned to the voices which knew how to repeat the sublimest echoes our kind has ever heard—the great voice is broken in a cry like a harp thrown to the flames.

Where is the Triumph? Isadora wanted to nourish human beings on the joy of being alive; she wanted them to know how to draw into their very depths the glow of life. And we—and each one of us—we drew in that glow and were before her as scholar-children. We disdained that which she disdained: matter, vanity, spitefulness, and mourning.

And mourning.

For her, for the tenacious tragedy that was her life, it would be a pitiful choir were there only the nameless voice to which you are now listening.

But think, at this very moment, on two continents there are thousands, and I think, hundreds of thousands of voices repeating a single word: "Isadora."

The word that in hours of fervor, at the hours when there opened before us the heavy, hostile portals which shut Joy away from us, we repeated with such tearful gratitude: "Isadora."

She disdained mourning!

No one here, no one, whoever you are or whatever you have suffered; no one ever knew as she did what mourning was, or what empty arms were, cradling nothing.

And yet she disdained mourning.

I ask you now to listen to me, for she is about to speak.

Listen! It is a letter.

A young man, since dead, between those two dates, 14–18, had gone to listen to her, so that he might repeat her words in one of those sheets that last but a day. And afterwards, Isadora wrote to him:

"You found me the other day in a moment of great weakness.

"But when I read the impression I had made upon you I was frightened at the thought that my words perhaps would sow discouragement in a world where there is so much need, on the contrary, of Courage and Hope.

"In a moment of clear-sightedness and strength, we understand that even the worst Afflictions, Catastrophes, Horrors, are but a veil of mystery hiding other truths.

"I, who by my work have always tried to preach that Joy is stronger than Sorrow; that Death is only a door that leads us to the Eternal Harmony of the Universe; that the fearsome appearance of physical suffering and matter are merely an illusion which the initiated know how to interpret. (Forgive me, I cannot express myself in words, but I have often danced my Credo; and the triumphant proof was given by Beethoven in the great Hymn to Joy at the end of the *Ninth Symphony*). I will never forgive myself if, because of my words, repeated by you, a few souls, as sorrowful as I am, have been discouraged.

"I am going at once to start work, forward, always with the voices of unseen Angels, with Beauty, the Divine Music, towards the Joy and the Light that are our final goal."

Ah, it is not I who spoke of the voices of unseen Angels. It is she. Of these voices I once spoke, and she made a sign with her hand; but *she it was who heard them*, she it was who, in her nights, heard them, even as she saw the shining lights.

And if her conversation before the people she met, did not always contain the word "Angels" it is perhaps because she was absolved from all words as she was beyond them; because she was absolved from any other speech but that of genius; from any other prayer but genius.

So, with the voices of the unseen Angels, with the Divine Music, towards the Joy and the Light.

Weep not, Lisbeth, her sister: weep not, Raymond, her brother. My voice is not that of an actor trying to draw tears.

"Towards the Joy and the Light," do you hear?

So, we must forget and remember. We must remember the Joy and the Light. We must remember her, she who was Joy and Light.

Only yesterday, in your studio, close to her, with the blue curtains before which she had been all her life, Beauty and Light, I heard a hymn sweet with an infinite peace. With an unhopéd for peace.

Those who defy the laws of Time, those who wish for Joy when it is still weeping time, even those have the right finally—the *price paid*—to some recompense.

From the depth of the abyss Isadora believed in Triumph, she believed in Joy.

In the depth of the abyss, today, we cling one to the other, and, refusing to despair, with one voice, in my poor, humble, and fainthearted

voice, we send out over all, a single word. Out of the depth, beyond despair, towards that which, by the grace of a woman's genius will become tomorrow, right sure we are, a single word:

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